NEW

ALL ABOUT HISTORY

WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR AND THE NORMANS

HOW ONE AMBITIOUS DYNASTY CHANGED EUROPE FOREVER

THE NORMAN QUEEN WHO MADE BRITAIN THE HEART OF AN EMPIRE

WAR ✠ CONQUEST ✠ ROMANCE ✠ EMPIRE ✠ DEFEAT

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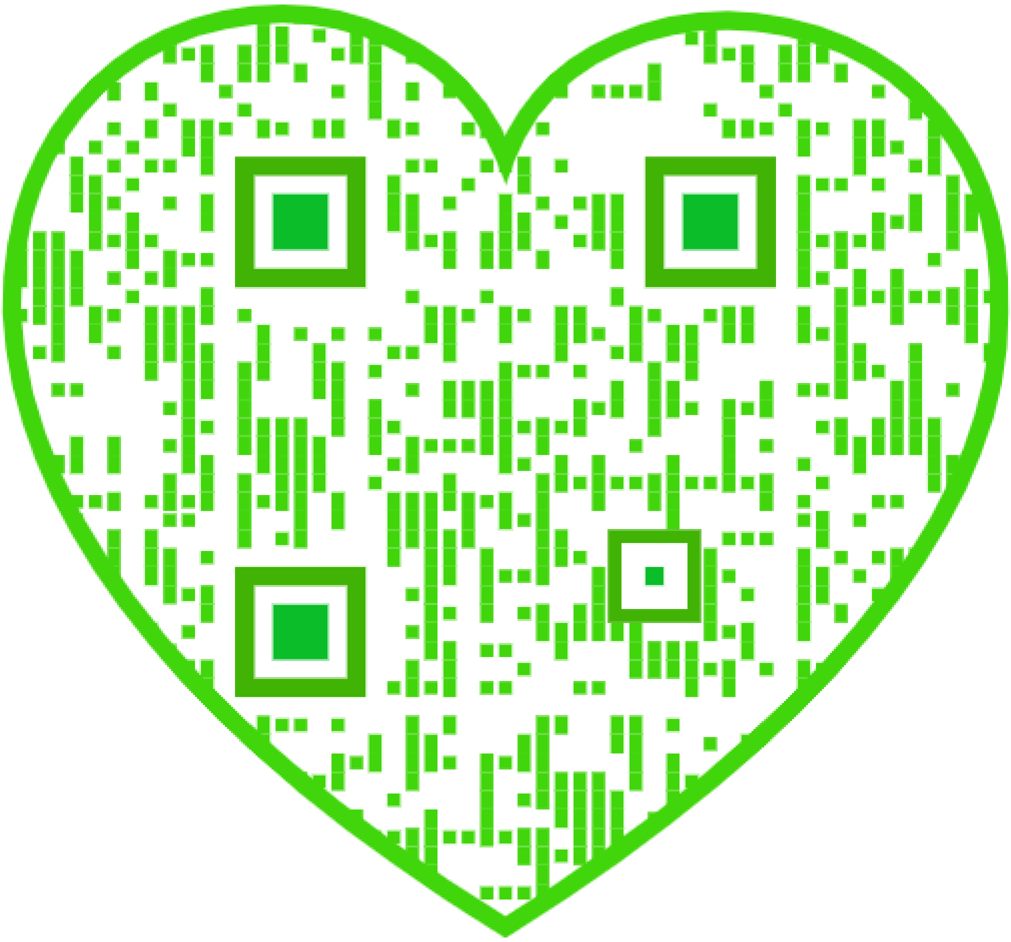

WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR AND THE NORMANS

In 1066, England changed forever. The Norman Conquest surged onto its shores, displacing the Anglo Saxon people that had come before and transforming their society, landscape and culture forever. Yet the seeds of 1066 were actually sown much further back in time, and the warring kings who vied for control of areas of the British Isles, France, and Scandinavia were actually much more closely related than you'd think. The Normans themselves had a much more profound influence on the world than you may first suspect. In this in-depth look at the rise and fall of their civilisation, you'll discover the surprising roots of the Normans and their ruling dynasty, learn about their unique culture and how it influenced, and was influenced by, a range of ideas from around the world, explore their tactical and martial prowess, and find out why, and how, they came to conquer England in 1066, and the ongoing impact that one Norman duke's quest for power and territory has had on almost a thousand years of history.

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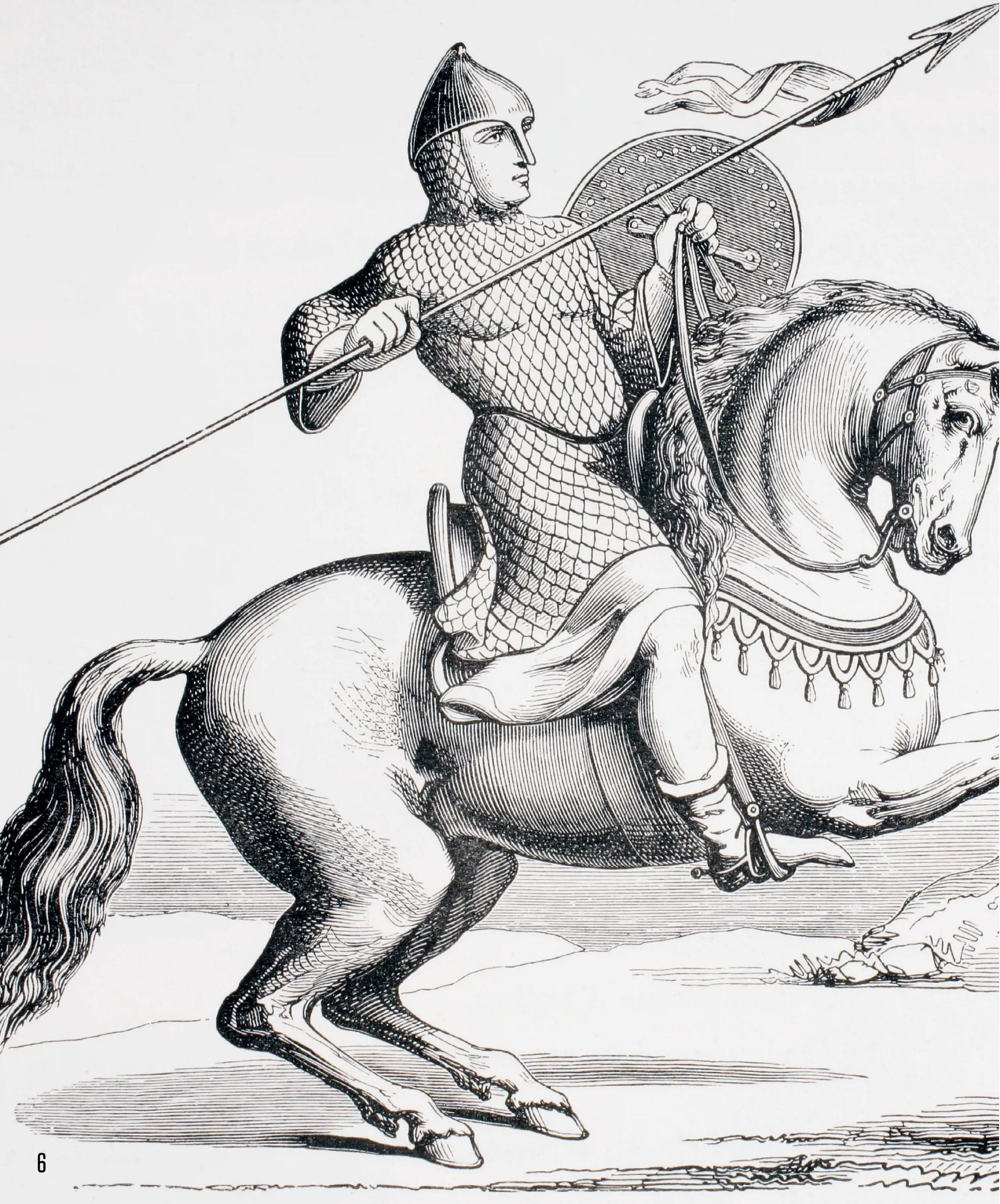


Kingdom of the Northmen

How a small duchy became a great medieval power

Visit Normandy today and you will find a settled agricultural land dominated by the bocage that caused Allied troops so much difficulty in the weeks after D-Day. But this quiet atmosphere belies the area's turbulent past. Normandy was fought over for centuries. The area enters recorded history in 53 BCE, when Julius Caesar conquered its Celtic and Belgic inhabitants as part of his campaigns to bring Gaul into the Roman Empire. After vigorous resistance, the local people settled comfortably into the Empire until the crises of the 3rd century CE brought the first devastating raids by Saxon pirates. After the temporary stabilisation brought about by the Emperor Diocletian, the region again fell prey to invading Germanic tribes from the beginning of the 5th century. But by the end of the 5th century, one of these tribes, the Franks, had become dominant under their king, Clovis. The Franks were devout Christians, and their patronage brought the foundation of many monasteries in the area, most famously the tidal island monastery of Mont-Saint-Michel, on which Saint Aubert built the first oratory in 709.

However, by the latter part of the 8th century and on into the 9th, what would become Normandy came under attack from a fresh wave of pagan raiders: the Vikings. The Carolingian Empire assembled by Charlemagne began to dissolve after his death and the Vikings exploited the political weakness attendant upon civil wars all they could. Among them was a Northman called Rollo (Hrólfr in Old Norse) of uncertain origin – the extant sources identify him as either Danish or Norwegian but the difference might have seemed moot to contemporary chroniclers. Rollo, having unsuccessfully laid siege to Paris, set up his base on the estuary of the River Seine near Rouen, from where he raided for a decade. Unable to expel Rollo, Charles the Simple, King of the Franks, hit on the strategy of turning poacher into gamekeeper: officially cede the territory that Rollo had occupied to the Northman, in return for Rollo swearing allegiance to him as king. The two men signed the Treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte in 911: Rollo was ceded the land from the River Epte to the sea, in exchange for defending the kingdom from Viking raiders.

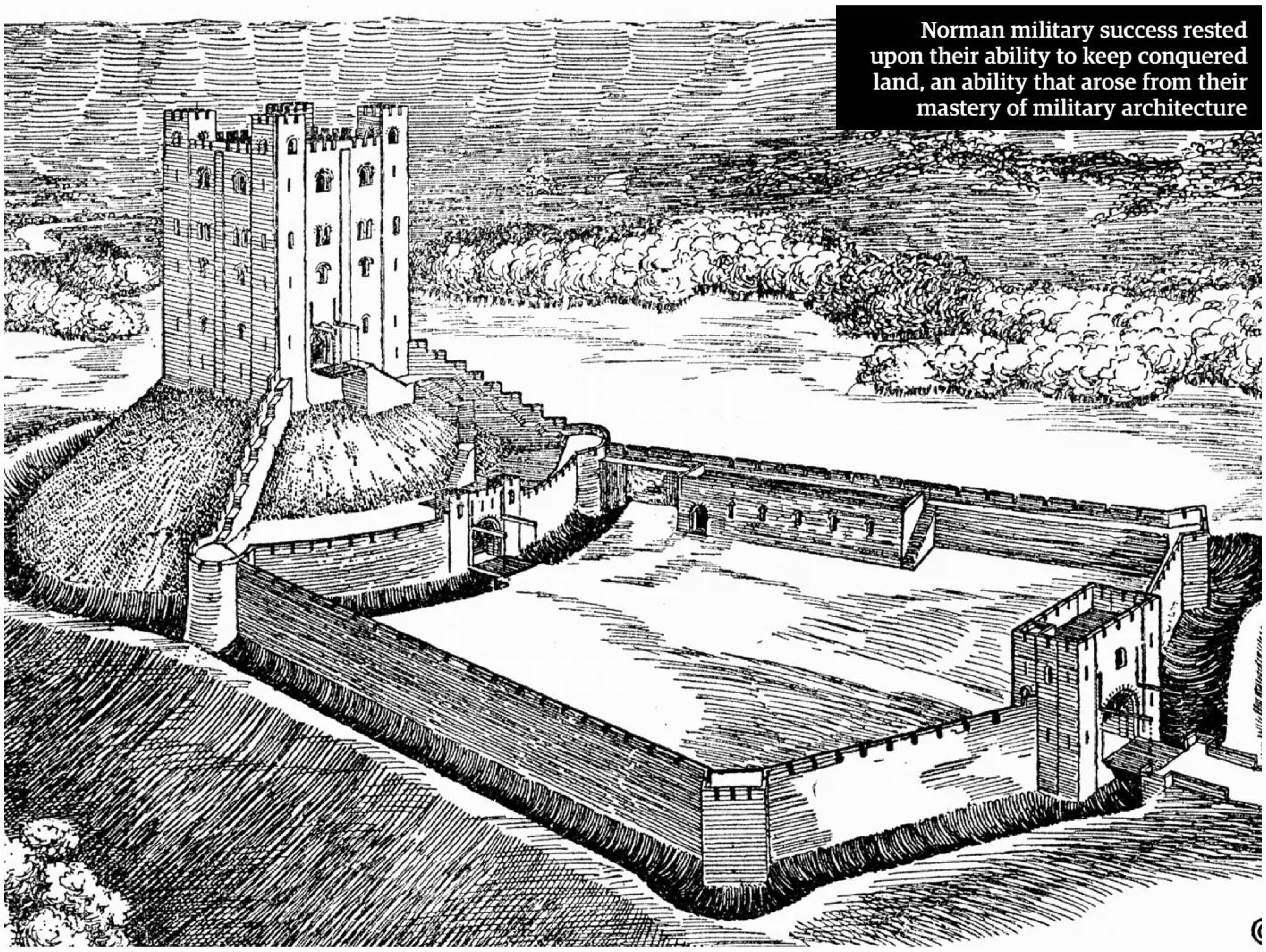
> Charles the Simple gave what would become Normandy to the Viking chieftain Rollo to stop him raiding Frankish lands

As part of the treaty, Rollo and his men agreed to convert to Christianity, and Rollo was formally baptised, taking the name Robert and being promised the king's daughter in marriage (although whether the marriage was ever finalised is unclear). As sign of his allegiance to Charles, Rollo had to

'La Merveille'

As the power of the Dukes of Normandy grew, so did their reliance on the protection of their great patron, St Michael. In 1020, Richard the Good (ruled 996-1027), son of Richard the Fearless, commissioned Abbot Hildebert to build a new abbey church upon the mount of St Michel. Romanesque architecture was in its infancy, but in their ambition to glorify the archangel, Richard and Hildebert asked extraordinary things of their new church. The rock of St Michel was shaped like a sugar loaf, rising 78.6 metres (258 feet) above the mean sea level. The obvious architectural choice would have been to cut the top off the mountain to create a solid and level foundation for the new church. But that would have been to step down from heaven. Instead, Abbot Hildebert took the apex of the rock for the ground level of his new church, and built out in all directions to provide the foundations. The apex of the rock is the centre of the church, the crossing point where nave and transept meet and join. On this rock, Hildebert built his church, the central tower rising directly from the apex of the mount, supported by the four piers that still hold the tower up, thrusting the statue of St Michael (a 19th-century addition) into the sky. Abbot Hildebert and his successors built out westward about two hundred feet from the cross of the church. A great medieval church never being properly finished, they were still building 150 years later, when Abbot Robert de Torigny rebuilt the west front of the church with two towers. That was two towers too many. One fell in 1300. Slowly, the west front gave way, so that in 1776 the whole façade and three spans of the nave had to be pulled down. Today, only four of the seven original seven spans of the nave survive.

The Marvel - 'La Merveille' - that's what Mont Saint-Michel is sometimes called. It is



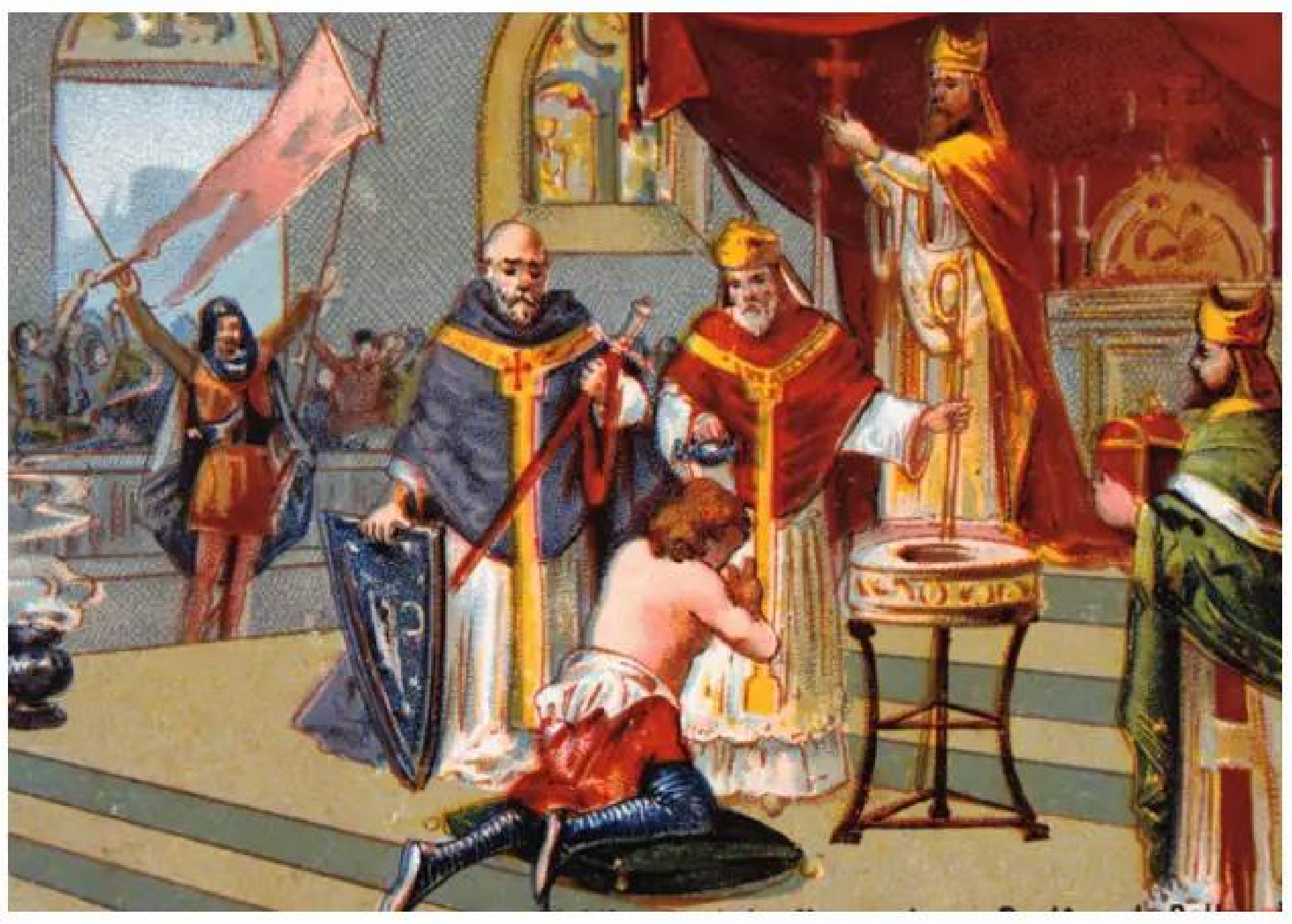
Norman military success rested upon their ability to keep conquered land, an ability that arose from their mastery of military architecture

formally place his hands into the hands of the king. To drive home the point that Rollo was the subject of the king, the bishops attending proposed that Rollo kiss Charles' foot as well. The Northmen were not at all keen on the idea and came up with a compromise: one of his men would do it on his chief's behalf. But when he stood before the king, he grabbed Charles' foot and hauled it up to his lips, causing the king to fall over. The Normans were to remain a disrespectful thorn in the side of the French monarchy for another three centuries.

The treaty did not preclude Rollo from continuing to act as a Viking chieftain, so long as he did not attack the lands belonging to Charles, and in the following decades he expanded the territory under his control until, by his death c.932, it included almost all the land that would become the Duchy of Normandy.

The Viking settlers also acquired a name during this time: Normanz, the plural form of an Old French word (singular Normand, Normant) that meant 'North man' that was itself derived from the Old Norse word, Norðmaðr, which in Latin became Normannus or Nortmannus. By derivation, the land they had settled came to be called Normandy.

Along with a new name, the North men had become enthusiastic converts to their new religion. Rollo's son, William Longsword, conquered the



Defining moment

Vikings on the make

951

What to do about these Northmen? The question tormented all the monarchs of north-western Europe. With their supremely manoeuvrable longships, the raiders could achieve tactical local superiority in a time when communications and land-based travel were slow. So Charles the Simple, proving himself not so stupid, decided to grant the Viking leader, Rollo, the region north of the River Epte up to the coast, on the understanding that Rollo would prevent other Viking raiding parties sailing up the River Seine to attack Paris. It proved a masterstroke.

Timeline

57-56 BCE

Roaming Romans
Julius Caesar, campaigning to clear his debts and gain glory, attacked into north and north-west Gaul over two campaigning seasons, bringing the provinces under the control of what was still the Roman Republic.

Late 3rd century

Barbarians at the coast
Raids by ship-borne Saxon and other Germanic tribes caused the building of the Saxon Shore system of forts in an ultimately futile effort to turn back the barbarian tide.

851

Vikings on the river
Having been summer raiders, Viking war bands took to setting up camp over winter in the lower reaches of the Seine estuary, ready for a new season of plunder and slave taking, rather than sailing home again.

1002

Marrying up
Richard the Good, Duke of Normandy, married his sister, Emma, to King Æthelred of England. It was a good match: the sister of a duke marrying a king, and it was the start of the fateful linking of the crown of England to the Duchy of Normandy.

966 - 996

Consolidation
Richard I, known as the Fearless, expanded feudalism in Normandy, ensuring that his barons were personally loyal to him, and then for the last 30 years of his long reign stabilised the duchy, making it a formidable player among the kingdoms and duchies of Francia.

Cotentin Peninsula in 933, bringing the tidal island of Mont-Saint-Michel under Norman control. The dukes favoured the Benedictine monastery there, and Richard the Good, son to Richard the Fearless, sponsored the building of the Romanesque church on the isle. The complex of buildings on the island became one of the wonders of the medieval world.

Richard the Good (Richard II) was the first Duke of Normandy, his father, grandfather and great-grandfather having taken the lesser title of Count of Rouen. Richard the Good also numbered among the many leaders to inflict defeat on King Æthelred of England for, in 1000, Æthelred had led an attack on the Cotentin Peninsula intending to capture Richard to prevent Viking raiders using Normandy as a safe haven. The attack proved an ignominious failure, leading Æthelred to put his body on the line in a different way: he contracted a marriage with Richard's sister, Emma, thus fatefully linking the house of Normandy to the English crown.

The Norman dukes had become major players in French politics, their power so great that the dukedom, while nominally subject to the King of France, was virtually an independent state. However, it was plunged into civil strife when Duke Robert the Magnificent died while returning from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, leaving his eight-year-old illegitimate son as nominal heir. The boy, known as William the Bastard by his many domestic enemies, survived the turmoil of his childhood to become William the Conqueror, the duke who became a king.

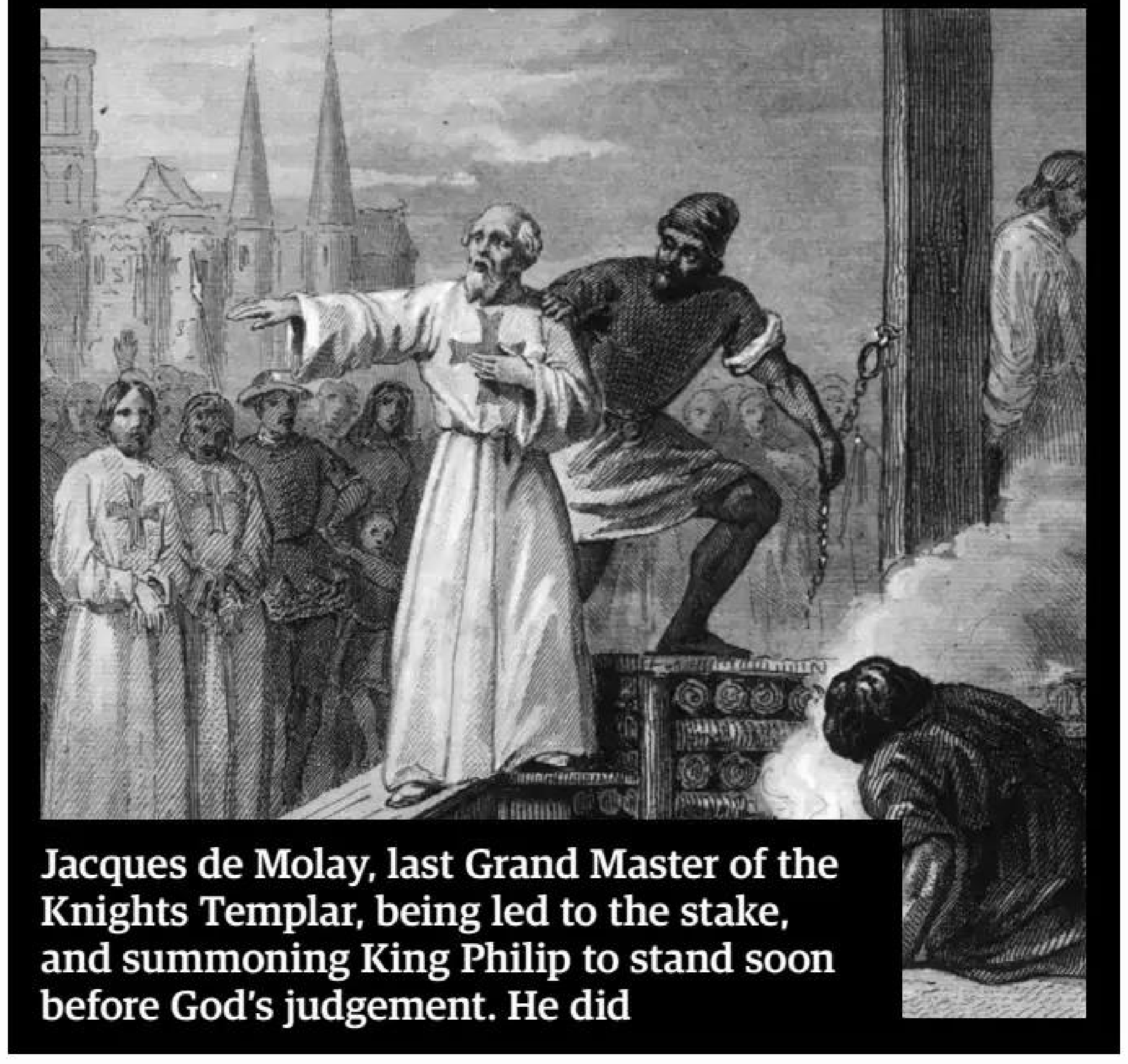
William's conquest of England would, in the end, be the death of the Duchy of Normandy. William's sons disputed the succession, their quarrels being resolved on the battlefield at Tinchebrai in 1106 when Henry I, King of England, defeated his brother, Robert Curthose, Duke of Normandy, holding him prisoner for the rest of his life. Thus was also sown the seed of future conflict between England and France: as Dukes of Normandy, the successors to Henry I owed fealty to the kings of France, but as kings of England they were equals to the monarchs on the other side of the Channel.

The Duchy became part of the Angevin Empire when it was conquered by Geoffrey Plantagenet, Count of Anjou and husband to Empress Matilda, the only surviving child of King Henry I of England, in 1144, who then gave it over to his son, the future Henry II of England and the country's first Plantagenet king. The Plantagenet kings of England and the Capetian kings of France became locked into a decades-long struggle for power. At one point, the Angevins controlled half of France as well as England, but as dukes of Normandy, remained vassals of the French king. Angevin power waxed under Henry II and Richard the Lionheart, but fell apart when John took the throne and proceeded to acquire the nickname Lackland, as King Philip II, the first king to style himself 'King of France' rather than 'King of the Franks', gradually whittled away at the Plantagenet territory, finally winning a decisive victory at the Battle of Bouvines on 27 July 1214. Normandy was now a duchy in the gift of the King of France, and the kings had no interest in returning it. In 1259, Henry III, King of England, signed the Treaty of Paris, formally acknowledging that he no longer had a claim. The loss rankled deeply with the English monarchs, becoming one of the justifications for the Hundred Years' War, during which the duchy was reconquered early in the 15th century, only to be lost in 1450 following the Battle of Formigny.

> The Normans were to remain a disrespectful thorn in the side of the French monarchy for another three centuries

Independent Normandy

Although the French crown reconquered Normandy early in the 13th century, the duchy had been, to all intents and purposes, independent of the French state for 300 years. During that time, a body of local laws, privileges and rights had grown up that the Normans were reluctant to cede to the French kings, with their predilection for centralising everything under their increasingly authoritarian rule. Tensions grew, and riots flared up against the rule of Philip the Fair (the French king who suppressed the Knights Templar on trumped-up charges of heresy). In an effort to protect their ancient rights, the Norman barons presented to Philip's heir, Louis X, a charter – the Norman equivalent to the *Magna Carta* – that sought to preserve these rights. Louis, in a weak position at the start of his reign, had little choice but to sign, thus guaranteeing, in principle at least, that the king could not impose a new tax upon the Normans without their consent, that the rulings of the chief Norman court at Rouen were final and could not be overturned by royal courts, and that the king would forswear arbitrary acts and punishments. While granted at a time when royal authority was weakened, the kings of France soon moved against the terms of the Norman charter, eventually reducing the duchy to a royal appanage. Normandy was simply too close to Paris and the centres of power to be allowed its independence.



Jacques de Molay, last Grand Master of the Knights Templar, being led to the stake, and summoning King Philip to stand soon before God's judgement. He did

Defining moment

The Conquest 1066

England had been conquered before, by the Romans, and then the Danes in 1015, but the conquest by William in 1066 was pivotal. It replaced almost all the upper echelons of Anglo-Saxon society with Norman, Breton and French lords, led to us having names like Robert and Richard rather than Ælfweard and Eadwig, and turned the sociopolitical orientation of England southwards. Before, the most significant links were eastward across the North Sea to Scandinavia, now they were south to the other side of the Channel.

Defining moment

Battle of Bouvines

27 July 1214

Alarmed by the conquests of Philip II, a coalition assembled, including King John of England, the Holy Roman Emperor Otto IV and the Count of Flanders. Although John was not present at the battle, his hopes of restoring the Angevin Empire rested upon the defeat of Philip II. The French charged repeatedly, winning a decisive victory. With no hope of regaining his lands in France, King John had little option but to sign the charter his barons brought him a year later, the *Magna Carta*.

28 September 1106

Battle of Tinchebrai

Robert Curthose, William's eldest son, was bequeathed the Duchy of Normandy on his father's death. Rivalry between the sons of William led, finally, to Henry, by 1100 king of England, invading Normandy and defeating his brother in battle. Robert spent the rest of his life, 28 years, as a prisoner.

1144

Normandy conquered

In 1128, Geoffrey, count of Anjou and a traditional Norman enemy, married Matilda, daughter of Henry I and his only surviving child. Anarchy followed when Stephen of Blois was declared king of England and Duke of Normandy. Geoffrey responded by invading and conquering Normandy.

18 May 1152

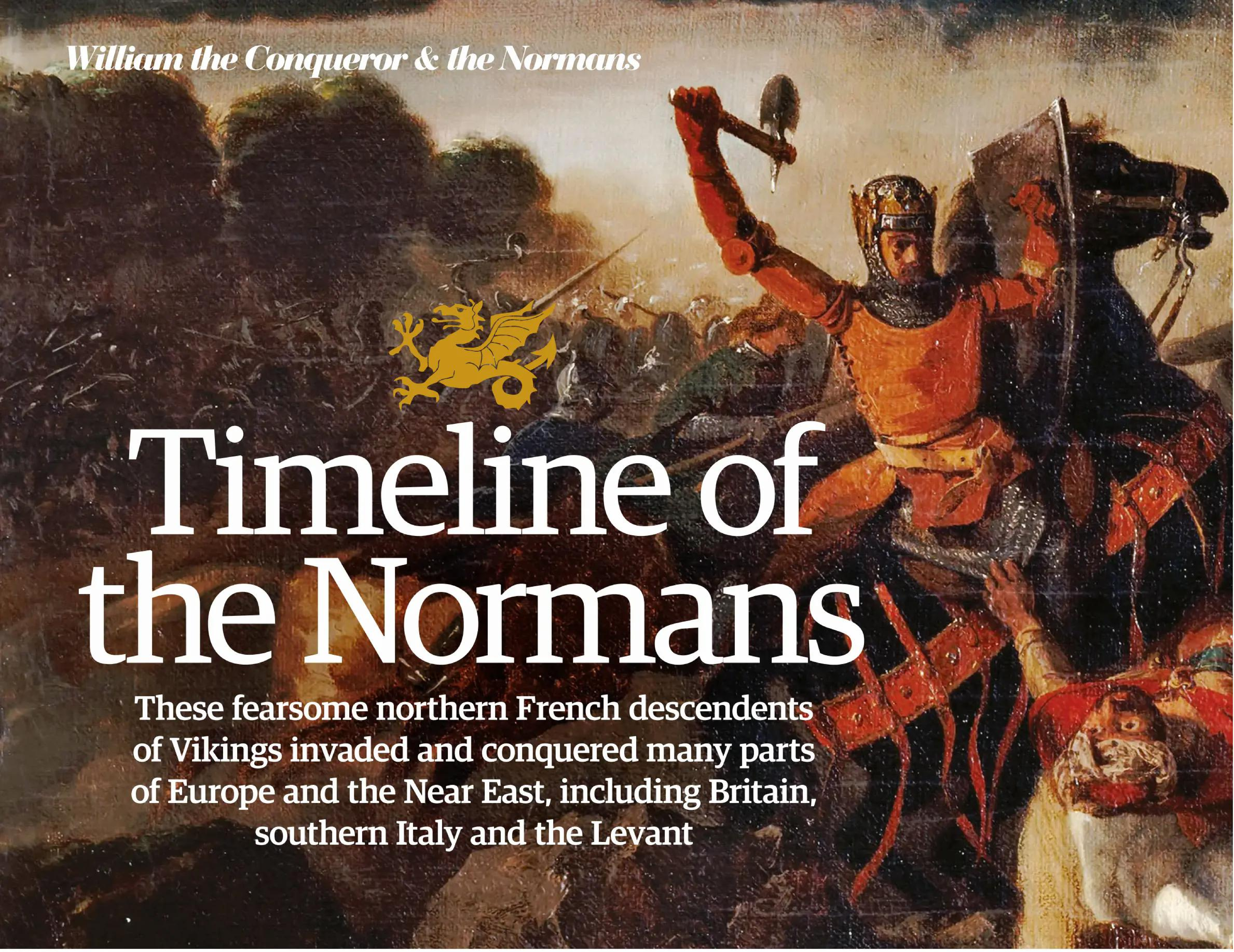
Angevin Empire

Henry II, King of England and Duke of Normandy, married Eleanor of Aquitaine, bringing England, Normandy, most of Wales, much of Ireland and the western half of France under his control in what would be called the Angevin Empire.

1202-1204

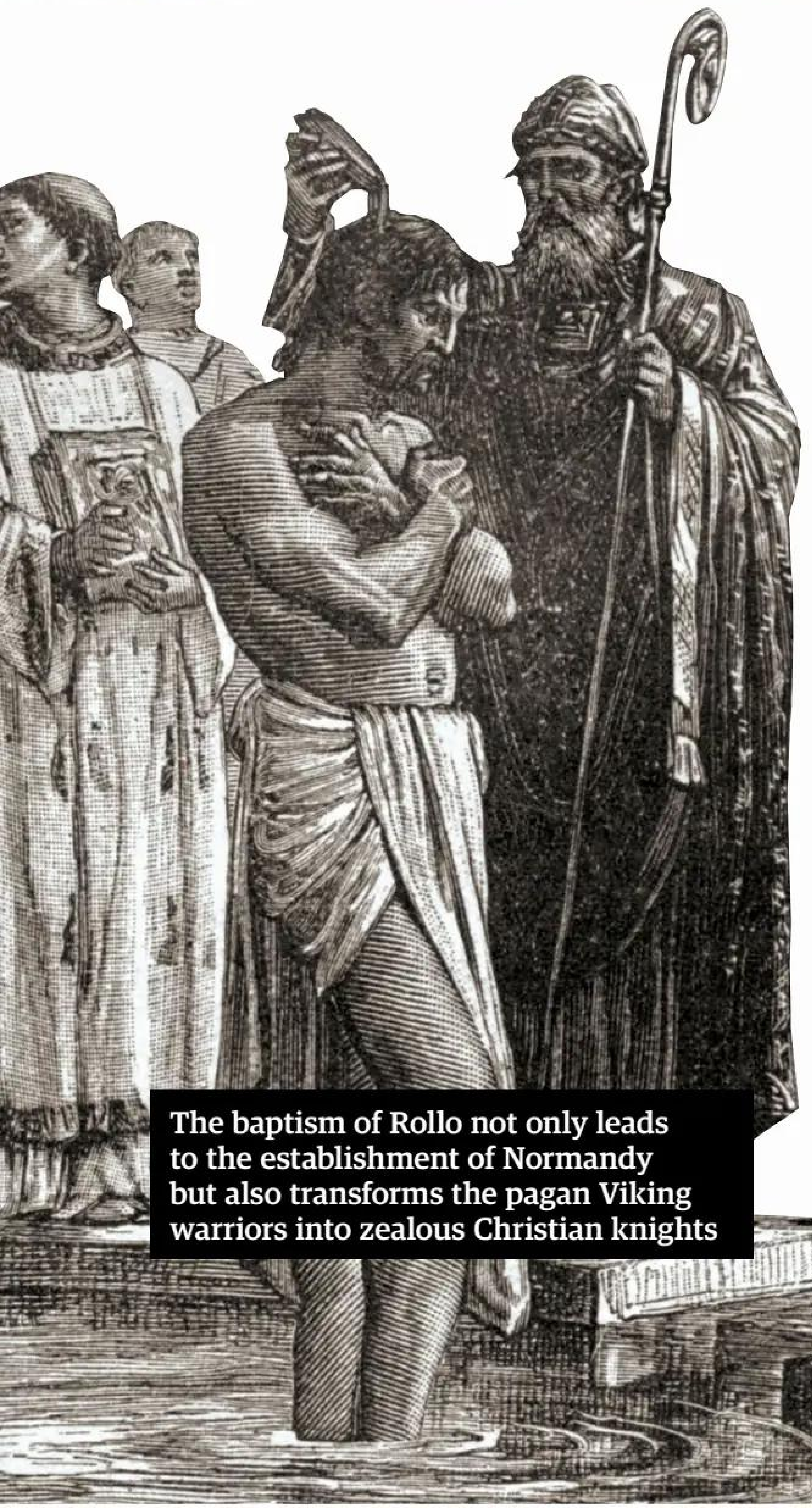
France conquers Normandy

During a two-year campaign, Philip II, King of France, defeated King John of England – a defeat brought about in large part through John's ill treatment of his local allies – and by August 1204 Philip had conquered Normandy.



Timeline of the Normans

These fearsome northern French descendents of Vikings invaded and conquered many parts of Europe and the Near East, including Britain, southern Italy and the Levant



The baptism of Rollo not only leads to the establishment of Normandy but also transforms the pagan Viking warriors into zealous Christian knights

Defining moment

The Settlement of Normandy

999

Charles the Simple, King of West Francia, grants land around Rouen to Rollo, the leader of local Viking settlers. In return, the pagan Rollo agrees to be baptised and he becomes the first ruler of the duchy of Normandy. The duchy is named after its Viking inhabitants from the Old French word 'Normanz', which is the plural word for 'northman'.

Timeline

Norman Conquest of Southern Italy

999-1139

Normans begin to settle in southern Italy and often act as mercenaries for petty rulers. Over the course of decades, Norman warriors establish their own lordships and even capture Pope Leo IX. Subsequent papal endorsements lead to the conquest of Sicily and the creation of a Norman Sicilian monarchy.

Byzantine-Norman Wars

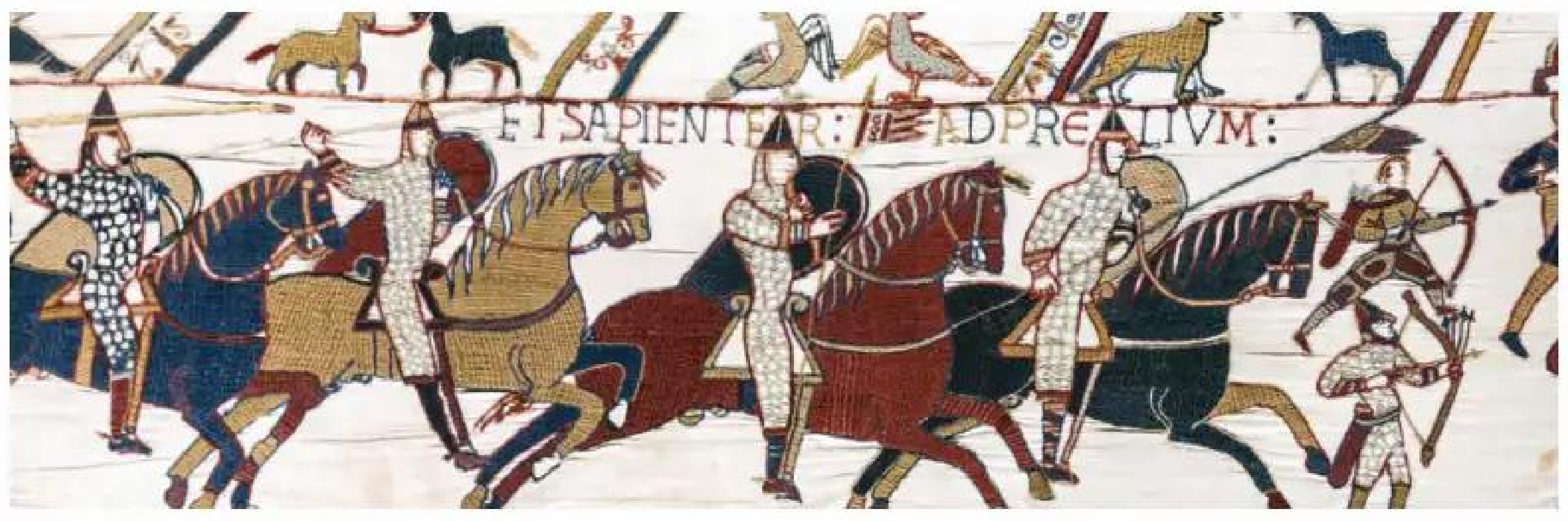
1040-1185

Normans capture Byzantine provinces in southern Italy and launch invasions of the Balkans. The Byzantines fight back and, despite Norman ambitions to capture Constantinople, they are eventually forced to withdraw.

Conquest of England

1066

William, Duke of Normandy invades England to claim the throne from Harold II. After a bloody battle at Hastings, Harold is killed and William is crowned king. The Normans brutally subjugate the English and their culture profoundly changes the kingdom.

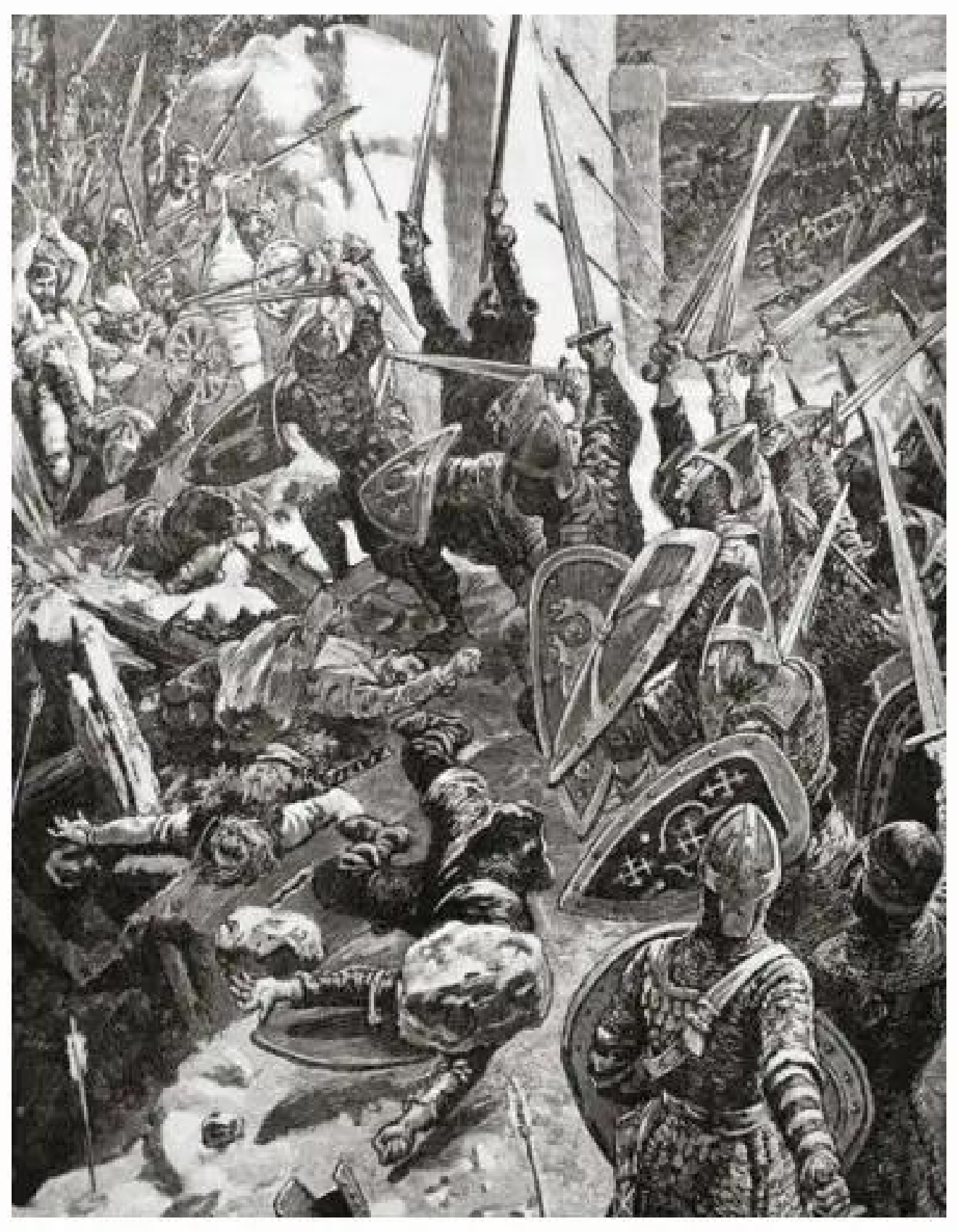


Over the course of decades, Norman warriors establish their own lordships and even capture Pope Leo IX

Invasions of Wales, Scotland & Ireland

1067-1171

Following the conquest of England, the Normans spread their influence over the Celtic parts of Britain with a series of invasions, settlements and the construction of castles. Their impact permanently alters the course of British history.

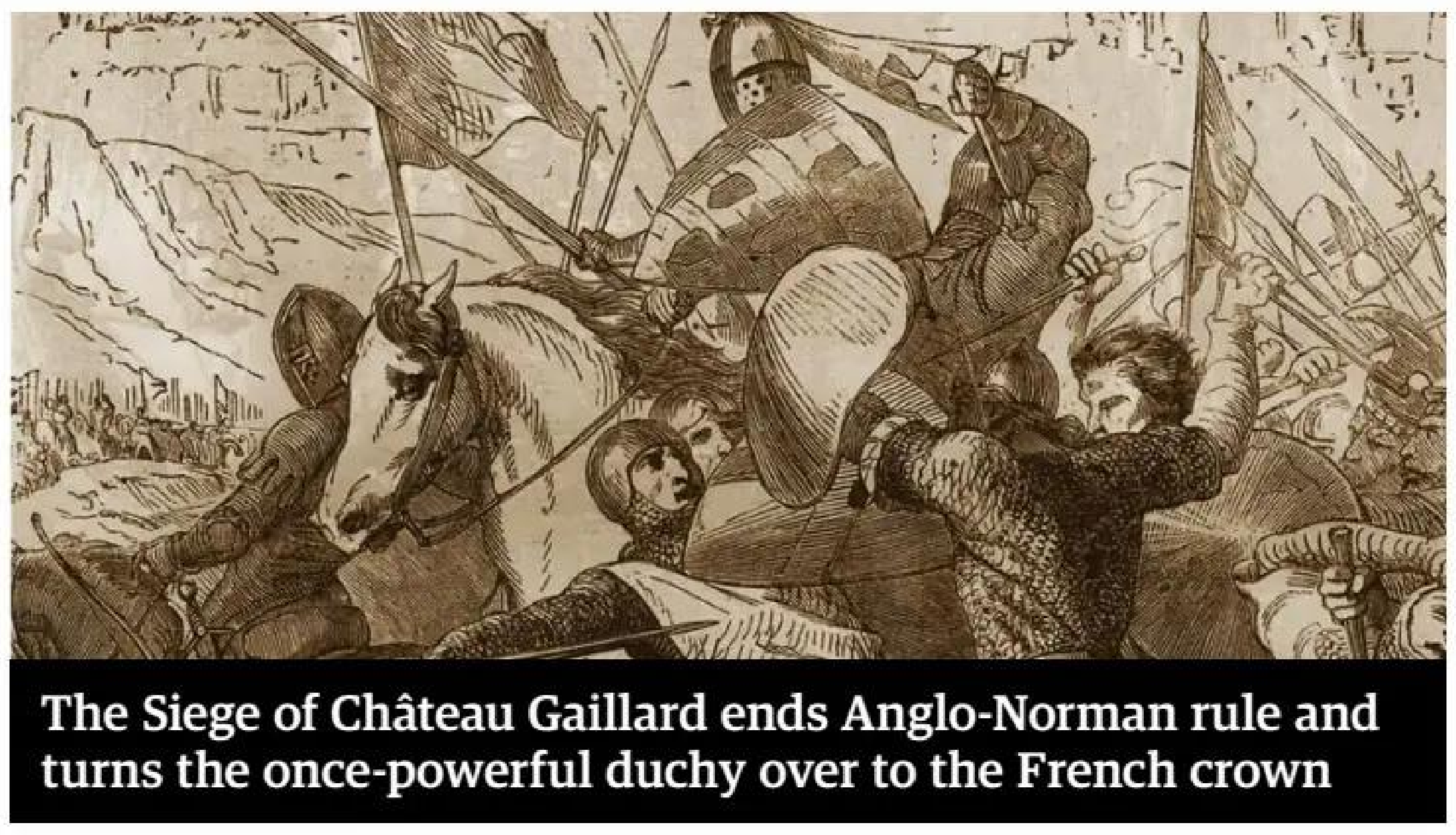


Normans invasions of Ireland in the late 12th century begin over 800 years of English influence

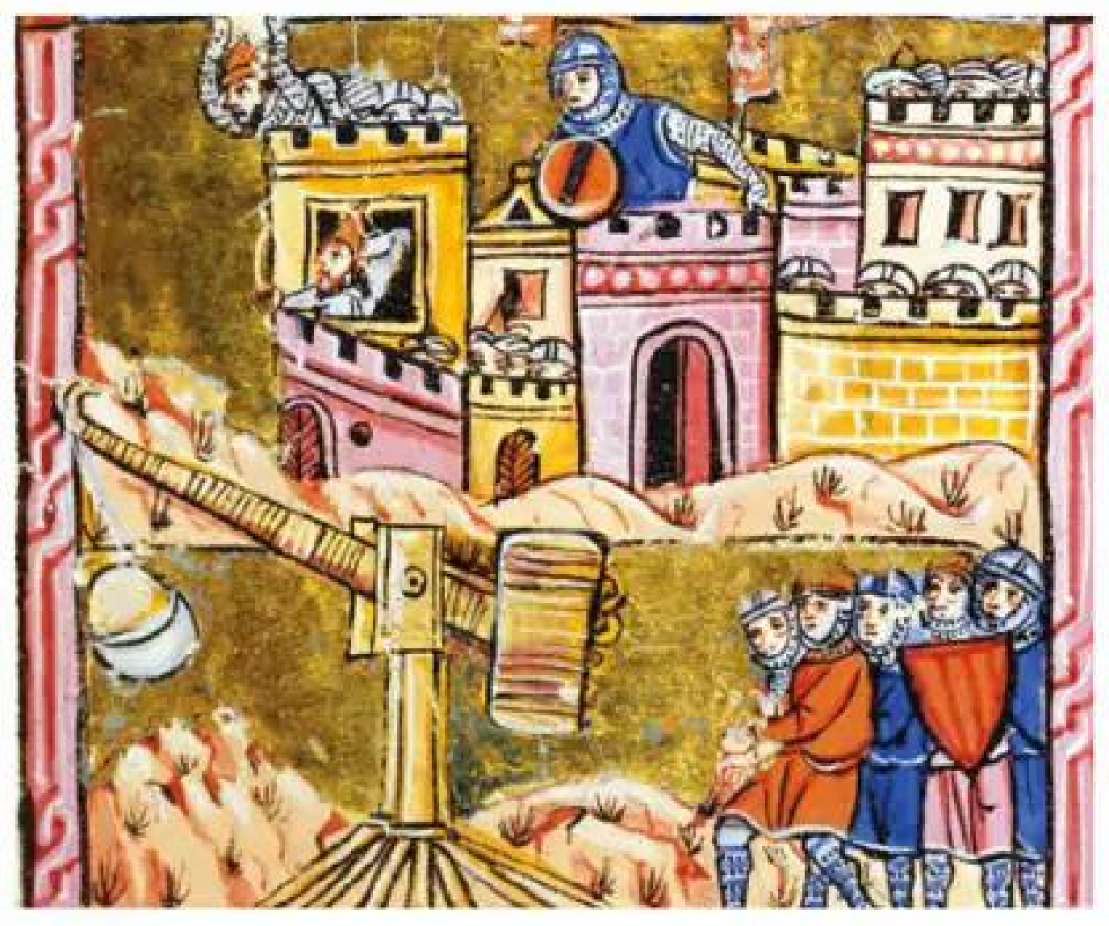
French Invasion of Normandy

1202-04

King John of England loses Normandy to the French after being defeated on campaign by Philip II of France. Only the Channel Islands remain from John's territories in the duchy. As a result, the Norman aristocracy in England gradually becomes fully assimilated into English society.



The Siege of Château Gaillard ends Anglo-Norman rule and turns the once-powerful duchy over to the French crown



Defining moment

First Crusade

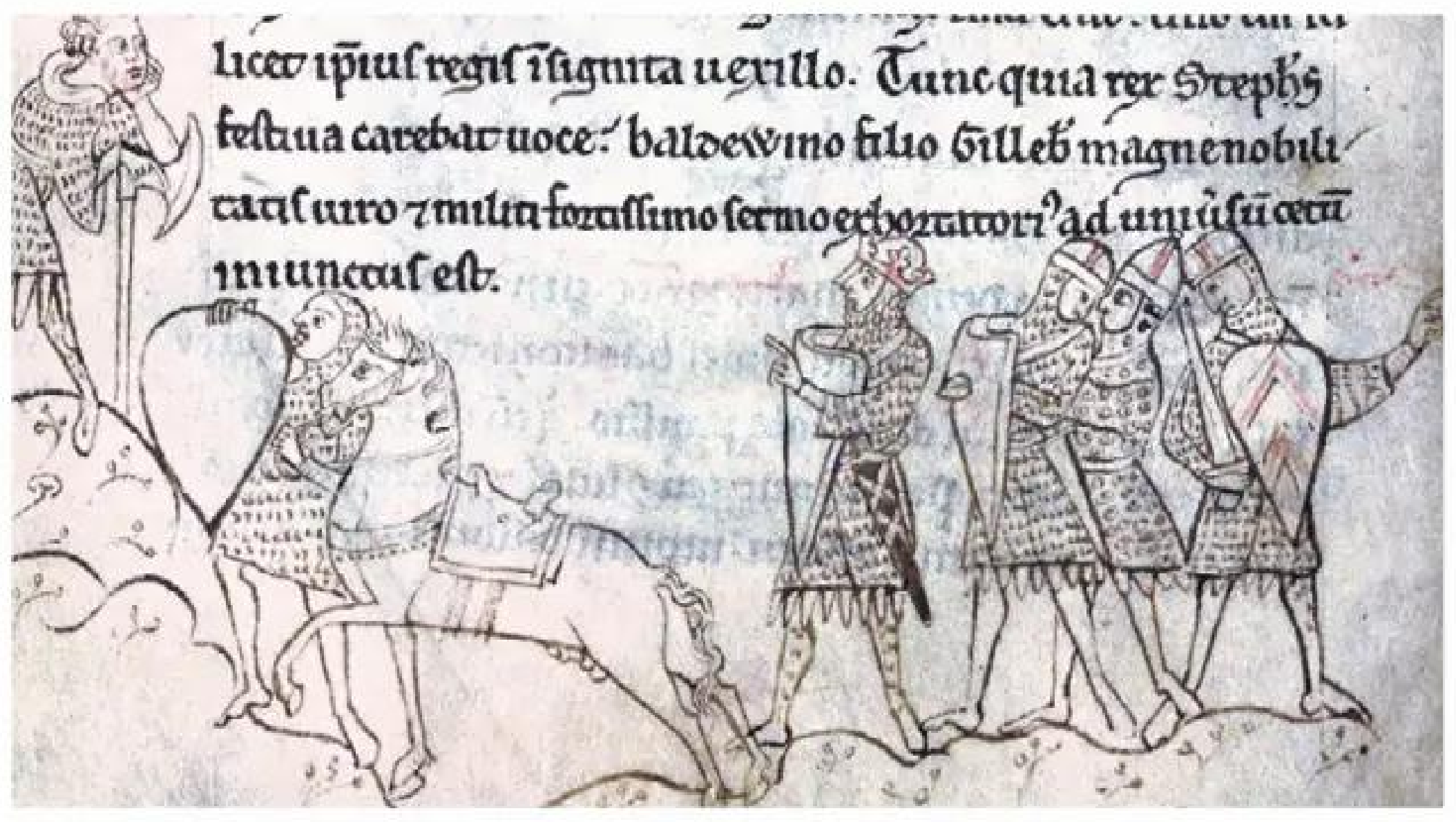
1095-99

Normans are at the forefront of military operations to take the Holy Land for Christendom, and they help carve out the principality of Antioch in 1098. Tancred and Robert II, Duke of Normandy are prominent crusaders who capture Jerusalem in 1099.

The Anarchy

1135-54

England and Normandy descend into a vicious civil war for the English crown between King Stephen and Henry I's daughter Matilda. The Norman dynasty in England ends upon Stephen's death, when Matilda's Angevin son Henry II becomes the first Plantagenet king.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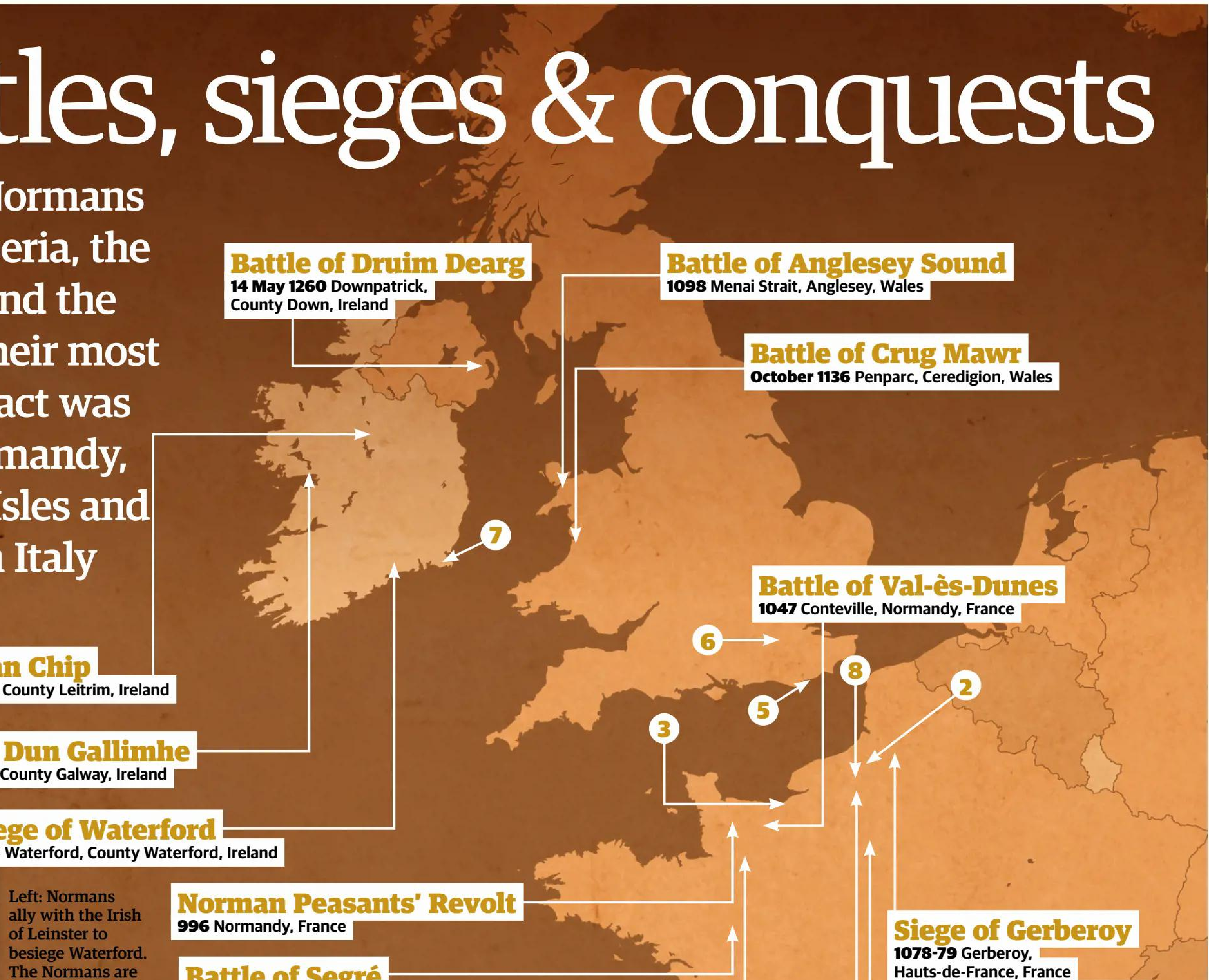
Images: Alamy, Getty

Battles, sieges & conquests

Although Normans fought in Iberia, the Balkans and the Near East, their most direct impact was felt in Normandy, the British Isles and southern Italy



Battle of Druim Dearg
14 May 1260 Downpatrick, County Down, Ireland

Battle of Anglesey Sound
1098 Menai Strait, Anglesey, Wales

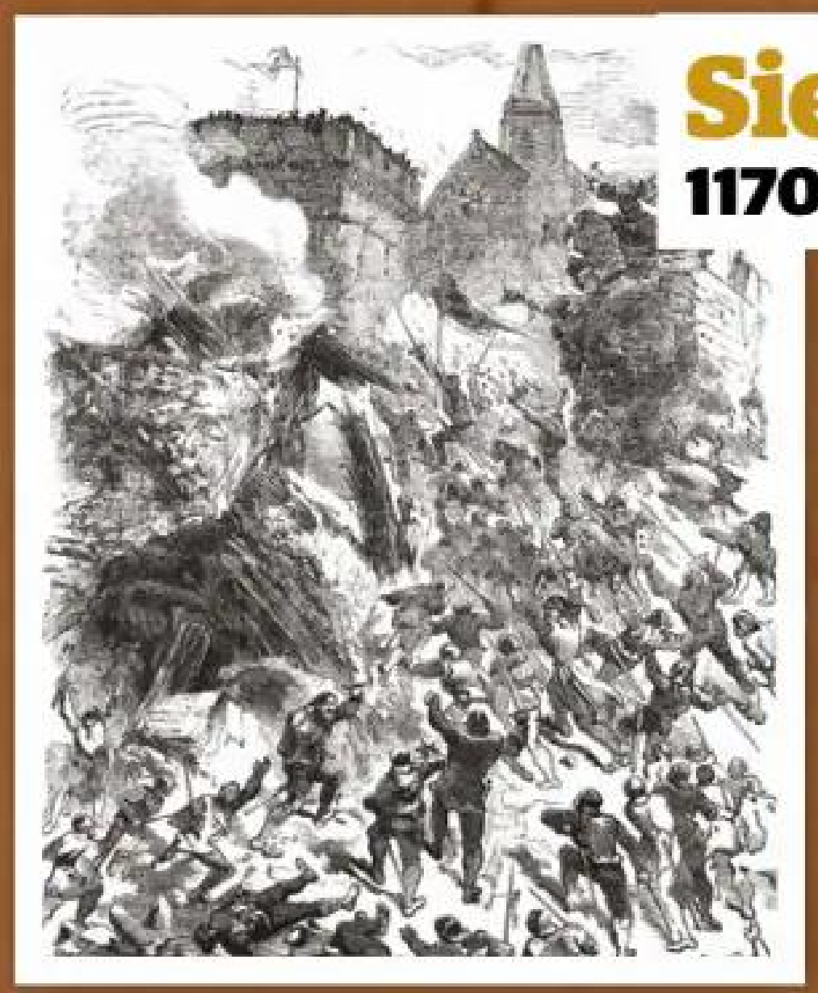
Battle of Crug Mawr
October 1136 Penparc, Ceredigion, Wales

Battle of Val-ès-Dunes
1047 Conteville, Normandy, France

Battle of Áth an Chip
1270 Carrick-on-Shannon, County Leitrim, Ireland

Sack of Dun Gallimhe
1247 Galway, County Galway, Ireland

Siege of Waterford
1170 Waterford, County Waterford, Ireland

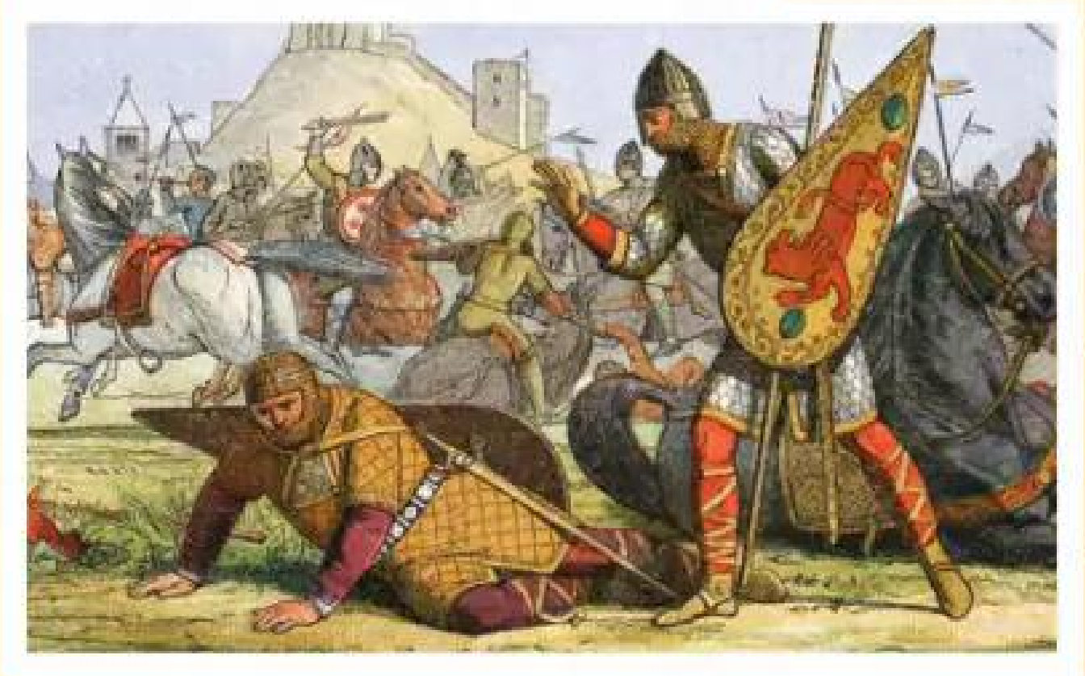


Left: Normans ally with the Irish of Leinster to besiege Waterford. The Normans are led by Richard de Clare, Earl of Pembroke

Norman Peasants' Revolt
996 Normandy, France

Battle of Segré
1066 Segré, Pays de la Loire, France

Siege of Gerberoy
1078-79 Gerberoy, Hauts-de-France, France



William the Conqueror is wounded while fighting his eldest son Robert Curthose during a battle at Gerberoy

Battle of Tinchebray
28 September 1106 Tinchebray, Normandy, France

Battle of Brémule
20 August 1119 Gaillard-Cressenville, Normandy, France

Siege of Thimert
1058-60 Thimert-Gâtelles, Centre-Val de Loire, France

1 Battle of Civitate

18 June 1053 Foggia, Apulia, Italy

Humphrey de Hauteville defeats a papal coalition and Pope Leo IX is taken prisoner. The battle is the culmination of years of Norman mercenary campaigning in southern Italy.

2 Battle of Mortemer

1054 Mortemer, Normandy, France

Henry I of France occupies the Norman town of Mortemer but is defeated when William the Bastard (later the 'Conqueror') sets the town alight. William's victory enables him to secure his position as Duke of Normandy.

3 Battle of Varaville

August 1057 Varaville, Normandy, France

After Mortemer, Henry I of France decides to conquer Normandy, but Duke William surprises the French as they cross a ford. Many of Henry's men drown, and the king abandons further attempts to reduce William's power.

4 Battle of Cerami

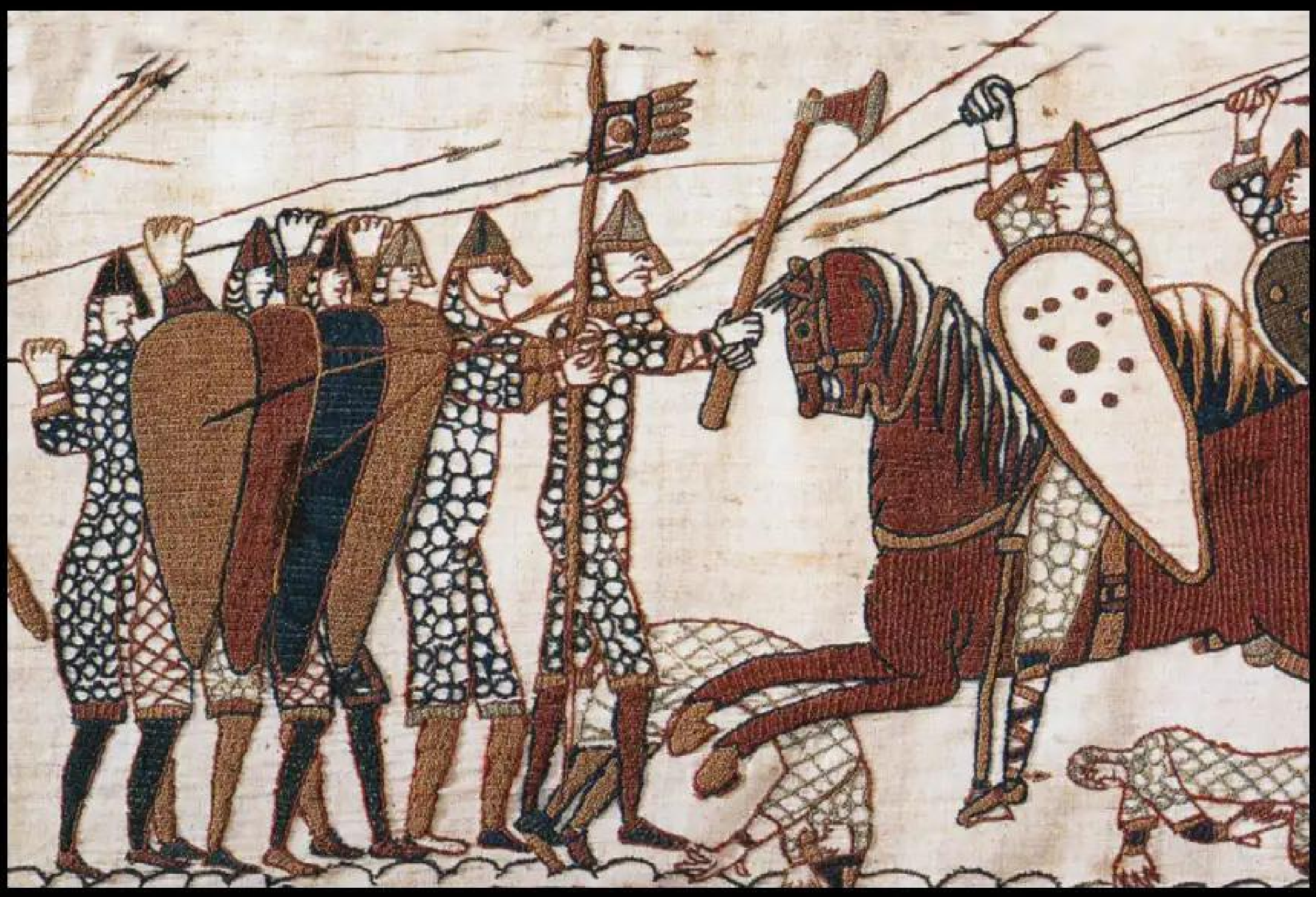
June 1063 Cerami, Sicily, Italy

Cerami is a major victory against Muslim forces in Sicily. Roger de Hauteville (Roger I of Sicily) routs Kalbid and Zirid forces. The battle enables the Normans to capture Palermo.

5 Battle of Hastings

14 October 1066 **Battle, East Sussex, England**

Hastings marks the high point of Norman military might. England is conquered in one battle, where Duke William of Normandy defeats and kills Harold II, the last Anglo-Saxon English king.



Norman knights attack Anglo-Saxon soldiers who have formed a shield wall at Hastings. Cavalry plays a decisive part in William the Conqueror's victory

The White Tower is the most complete 11th century castle in existence and was one of the largest in Christendom. It forms the central part of the Tower of London

6 Construction of the White Tower

1078-1100 **London, England**

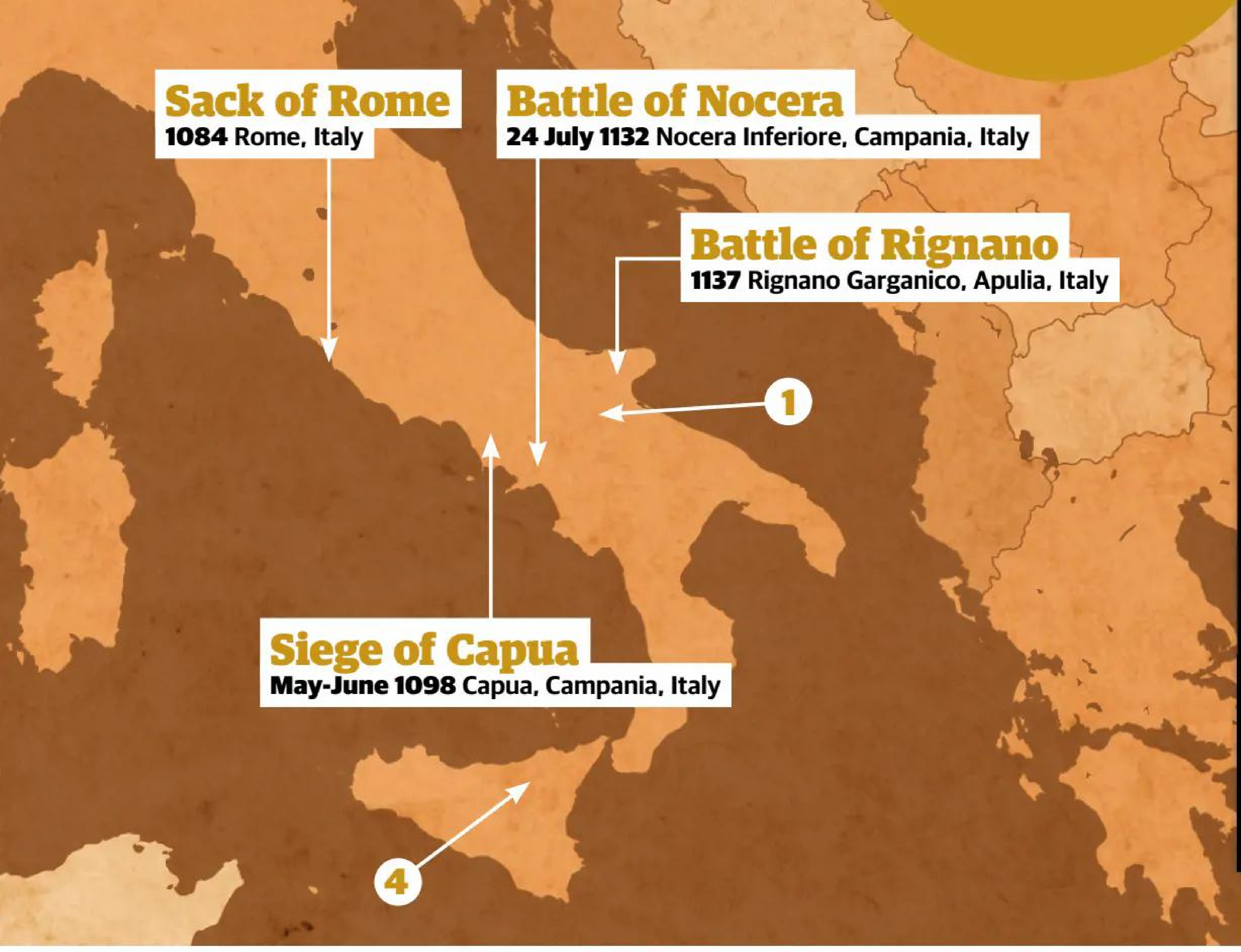
Stone castles are the most formidable military symbol of Norman authority. William the Conqueror builds the most famous castle in London, which is known as the 'White Tower'.

7 Siege of Wexford

May 1169 **Wexford, County Wexford, Ireland**

Robert FitzStephen leads an expeditionary force of Norman soldiers to assist Diarmait Mac Murchada in southeast Ireland, and they advance on Wexford. The town falls, and Wexford comes under Norman control, along with areas of southeast Leinster.

> Castles are a key symbol of how the Normans transformed the British landscape and social structure

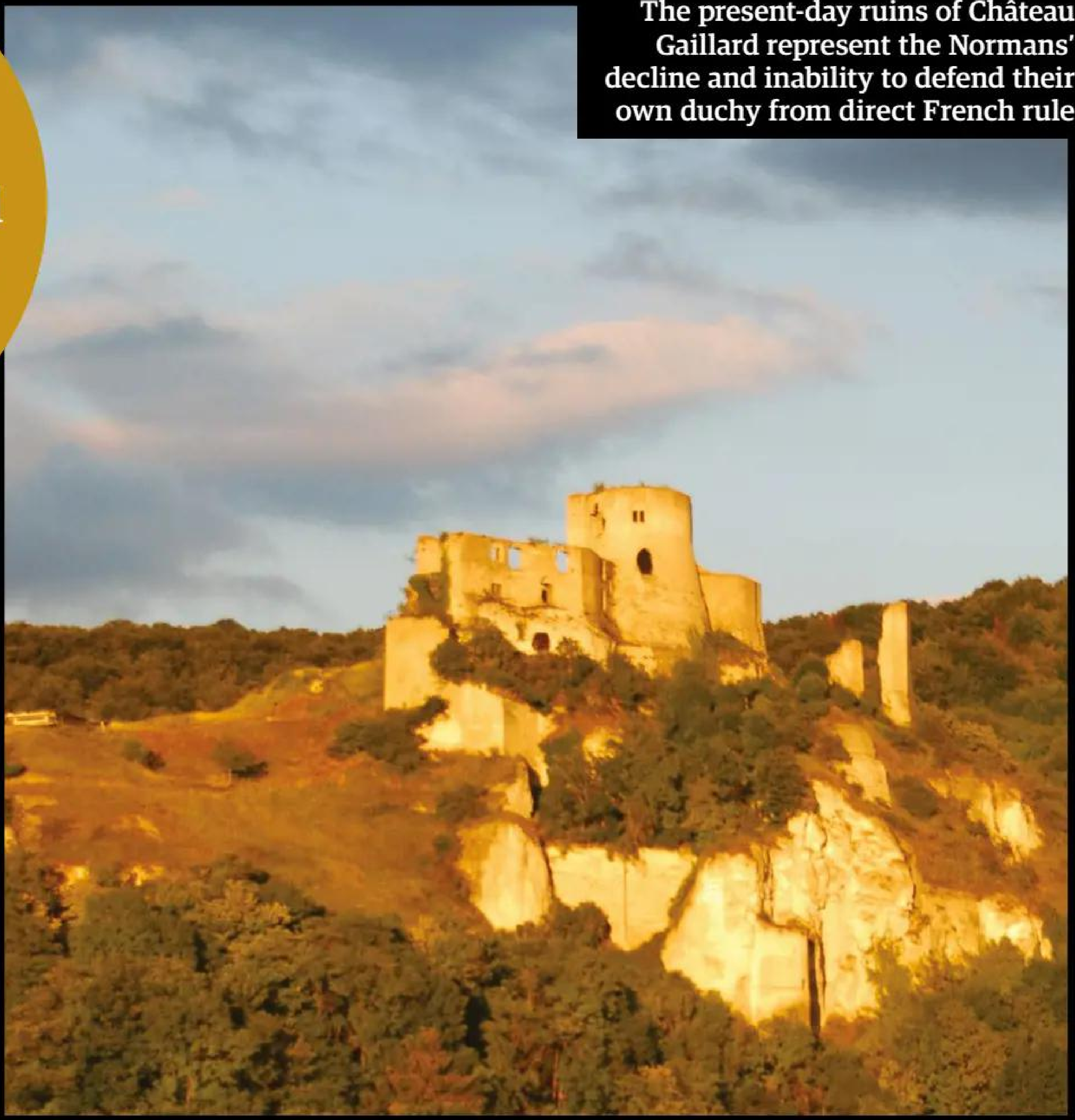


Sack of Rome
1084 Rome, Italy

Battle of Nocera
24 July 1132 Nocera Inferiore, Campania, Italy

Battle of Rignano
1137 Rignano Garganico, Apulia, Italy

Siege of Capua
May-June 1098 Capua, Campania, Italy



The present-day ruins of Château Gaillard represent the Normans' decline and inability to defend their own duchy from direct French rule

8 Siege of Château Gaillard

August 1203 - 6 March 1204 **Château Gaillard**

Philip II of France wrests control of Normandy from King John of England by besieging Château Gaillard. Every siege technique is used to take the castle, including mining tunnels, using Greek fire and siege engines, and even climbing up a toilet chute.

Images: Alamy, FreeVectorMaps.com

The Norman conquests

The Normans didn't just conquer England. These ex-Vikings carved out kingdoms and principalities through Europe and beyond

The king, Charles the Simple, lord of the Franks, stood waiting. Before him, the nominated Northman hesitated. What was he waiting for? It was all straightforward. The king had signed a treaty with the Northmen, ceding them the territory north of the River Epte to the coast, in return for their allegiance and conversion to Christianity. He has stood godfather to Rollo, the leader of the Northmen, at his baptism, and received his pledge of loyalty by taking the Northman's hands in his own. Now, to really underline who was in charge, one of the Northmen just had to kiss the king's foot. So why was he hesitating?

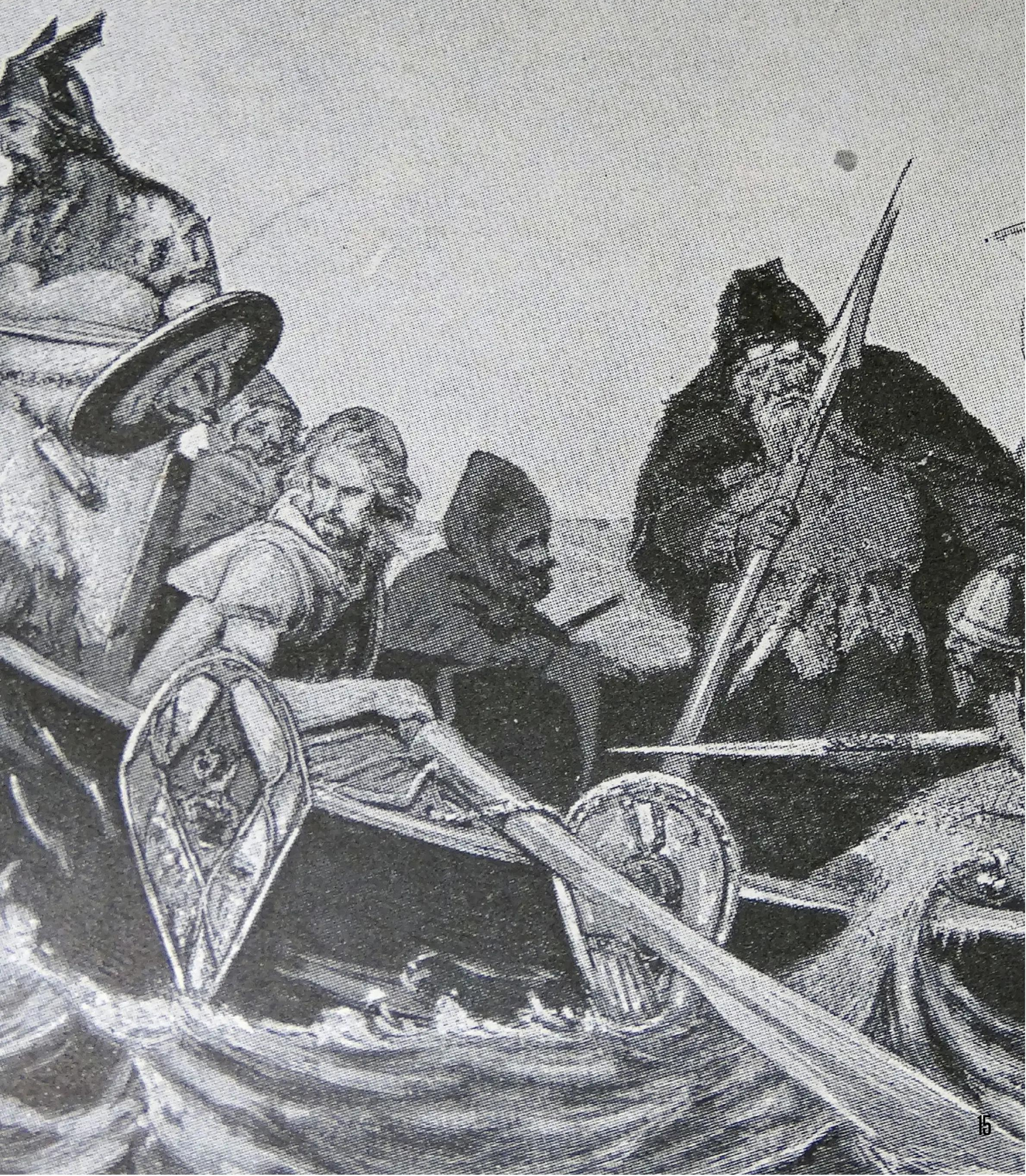
The Normans adopted Christianity with gusto, becoming a key force in the Crusades and building iconic churches

But before Charles could turn to his bishops, who had suggested the foot-kissing, to ask about the delay, the Northman, one of Rollo's chief warriors, finally bent down. Put instead of putting his lips to the king's foot, he grasped the foot and raised it, forcefully, up to his face. Taken by surprise, the king toppled over backwards.

This was in 911. Having raided extensively in France and Britain, Rollo and his band of Vikings settled around Rouen in the lower reaches of the River Seine, sea raiders turned land wardens through signing the Treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte. By 933, the Northmen, or Normans, had expanded the territory under their control to encompass almost all of the historic territory of the Duchy of Normandy. The Northmen had quickly abandoned their previous language, Old Norse, learning French, and just as quickly they forswore their old pagan gods, becoming devout and determined Christians.

But while the Normans had adopted some key aspects of Frankish civilisation, they retained many characteristics from their days as sea raiders, most notably restlessness and tactical cunning. But this amalgamation of Christian and Viking cultures produced something new: a reckless courage that often enabled them to face and defeat enemies who had apparently overwhelming numerical superiority. For the pagan Vikings, raiding and conquest was a matter of business: unless victory was practically certain they preferred to withdraw and fight again another day. But the Normans, fired by a new faith, really believed that by courage and daring, and with God's aid, they could overcome any odds. So they set out to do so.

In this they were greatly aided by their facility in adopting the military practices of the Franks. Once sea raiders, the Normans quickly became the most skilled knights in Europe, training their sons in the art of cavalry warfare from a young age. Having



Abolitionist Normans

Anglo-Saxon England was famous for two exports above everything else: hunting dogs and slaves. Slavery was deeply embedded in Anglo-Saxon society, with at least ten per cent and maybe as much as 30 per cent of the population enslaved. Writing in the 12th century, the Anglo-Norman chronicler, William of Malmesbury, noted how slave traders would buy up people throughout England then export them, the girls generally having been sexually assaulted first. But by the 12th century, William was writing about something that had ceased. By his time, some 60 years after the Conquest, the Norman kings had outlawed slavery. But why did they do so? After all, their Viking forebears had been enthusiastic slave traders: archaeologists have excavated the iron chains and collars they used to tether slaves. Historians, a sceptical bunch, used to think that the Normans ceased using slaves because rent-paying tenants were more profitable. But while that might have accounted for agricultural slaves, many female slaves were taken and kept as concubines. Moreover, England, with a vibrant economy and currency, continued the practice. It seems that the Normans abandoned slavery because of the moral scruples of their churchmen, who were in the vanguard of a great reform movement in the Church, and their ability to convince the nobility that slave taking and slave trading was wrong. Lanfranc, the Archbishop of Canterbury from 1070 onwards, was vociferous in his condemnation of slavery and William, Lanfranc's pupil as a little boy, complied. The ban was not immediately effective – a Church council condemned slavery in 1102 – but by the time William of Malmesbury wrote in the 1120s, slavery had effectively ceased in England.

Excavated manacles showing the chains Vikings used to restrain people taken to be sold as slaves

King John inherited property including England, Normandy, and parts of Ireland and France, then lost almost all of it

learned to move quickly and strike fast, the Normans adopted and refined the art of castle building, starting with the simple and portable motte and bailey that could be thrown up quickly in newly conquered territory, through to the great stone keeps that enabled them to dominate these territories despite being greatly outnumbered.

Pilgrimage united the Norman love of adventure, their restlessness and their religious fervour. Many set out on the perilous journey to the Holy Land, which was still in Muslim hands and a dangerous place to visit, stopping off en route in southern Italy. There, in the early decades of the 11th century, Norman mercenaries were recruited to fight both for and against the Byzantines, leading to the creation of the first Norman dukedoms and principalities outside of France.

Tancred de Hauteville (980-1041), a minor Norman noble, would have been forgotten by history if not for his children: he produced 12 sons with two wives, many of whom left Normandy for the Mediterranean. William, Drogo and Humphrey, sons from Tancred's first marriage, sailed to the Mezzogiorno around 1035, enlisting as mercenaries fighting for the Byzantines against the Arabs. After killing the emir of Syracuse in single combat, William got the nickname 'Iron Arm' and became the leader of the Normans in southern Italy, being

Defining moment

Treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte 911

Charles the Simple decided to deal with the problem of Viking raiders by giving the raiders who had established a camp on the lower reaches of the Seine title to the land in return for their swearing allegiance to him, converting to Christianity, and their acting as wardens to prevent other Vikings sailing up the Seine to raid Paris. In return, the Vikings, led by their chief, Rollo, received the land between the River Epte and the coast. Rollo, now Count of Rouen, expanded the territory under his control and by 933 the Duchy of Normandy was established.

Defining moment

Sicily 1061

Five years before their duke in Normandy ventured across the English Channel, Robert Guiscard and his younger brother Roger sailed across the Straits of Messina and land in Sicily, taking the strategically vital city of Messina, which commands the straits, unopposed after Roger took the garrison by surprise. Palermo fell ten years later and by 1085 they had the island under their control. It was an extraordinary achievement that highlighted the particular Norman combination of daring, cunning and determination. But it was their conduct as rulers that marked Robert and, especially, Roger as exceptional: they welded a disparate and often antagonistic population into a brilliant new culture.

Timeline

1002

Marrying up
Emma, sister to the Duke of Normandy, married Æthelred, the king of England, bearing him two sons, and fatefully linking the English crown to the Dukes of Normandy.

1017

Normans head south
The first Norman knights arrived in southern Italy on pilgrimage. They found a fractured political situation that welcomed effective mercenaries, so they stayed and gradually began to establish themselves there.

1066

The other conquest
The most famous date in English history led to the death of the last Anglo-Saxon king of England, the wholesale replacement of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy by Normans and their allies, and the devastation and depopulation of much of the north, as William savagely repressed rebellions.

1098

Crusade
Many Normans answered the pope's call for a crusade to take back the Holy Land. Among the crusaders was Bohemund, great-grandson of Tancred, whose sons had established the kingdom of Sicily. Bohemund became the ruler of the principality of Antioch.

proclaimed count of Apulia in 1042. Sending word back to their younger brothers in Normandy, the Hautevilles in the Mediterranean were joined by Robert, nicknamed Guiscard (which translates as 'the resourceful' or the less complimentary 'fox' or 'weasel') in 1047 and their youngest brother, Roger, in 1057. The two younger brothers conquered Calabria by 1060.

In Rome, the attitude of Pope Leo IX had swung from welcoming these potential allies against the Byzantines to fearing them, then to accommodating them at arm's length in the hope that their taste for conquest could be directed elsewhere. And just across the Straits of Messina, in Muslim-controlled Sicily, there was the ideal target. So in 1061, Robert and Roger de Hauteville began the first Norman conquest of a large island. It took them 30 years to gain complete control of Sicily; the fortunes of war did not always run according to plan. But with Sicily taken, the brothers proved wise and skilful rulers. Robert took southern Italy, while Roger became the first Count of Sicily. In Sicily, Roger declared Arabic an official language alongside Latin, Greek and Norman French, and recruited Muslim and Greek administrators to help govern the island. Under Roger and his son, Roger II, a unique Norman-Byzantine-Arab culture developed and flourished, producing architectural masterpieces such as the Cappella Palatina in Palermo and Monreale Cathedral, as well as fostering translations of Classical works from Greek into Latin and developing and improving the agricultural techniques brought by the Arabs to Sicily. The island became a byword for good administration and brilliant culture.

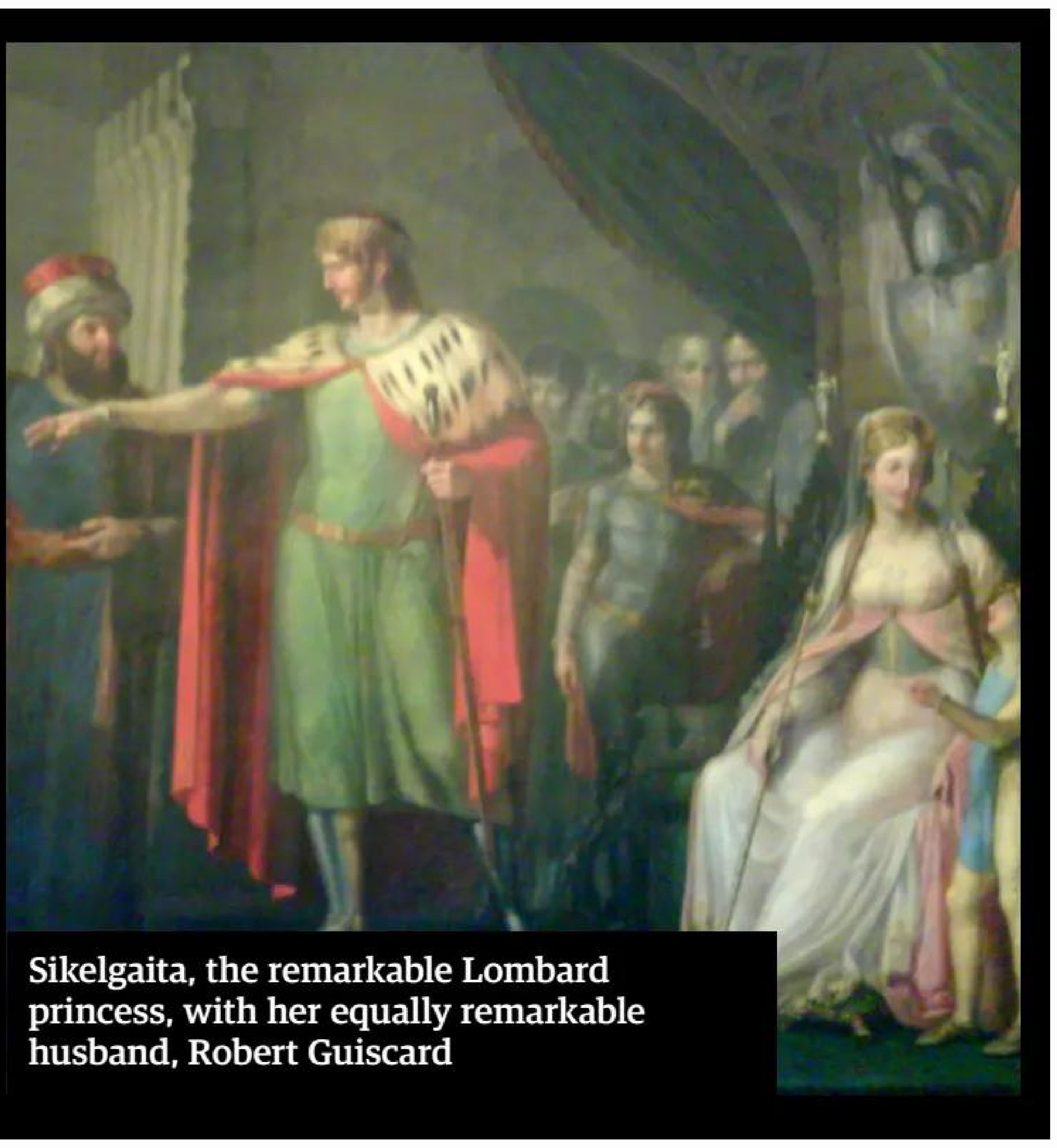
From Sicily, the Normans established bases along the coast of north Africa, putting garrisons into major towns from 1146 onwards although their presence there was short-lived, coming to an end in 1180. Normans also served as mercenaries for the emperors of Byzantium, while Bohemund, one of the leaders of the First Crusade (1095 -1099), was the great grandson of that minor Norman noble, Tancred de Hauteville, who had sent his sons south fifty years earlier. Bohemund became Prince of Antioch, one of the Crusader states and the most easterly of the Norman conquests. But the Normans expanded in other directions too.

After their famous conquest of England in 1066, the most obvious direction was west, into Wales. William installed some of his most powerful barons on the borderlands of the Marches, and gifted them great local power and almost complete autonomy. The Marcher lords became a power in their own right, and a threat to the English crown for the next few centuries, with Roger Mortimer even deposing Edward II in 1326 and becoming the ruler of England in all but name for three years. However, the Welsh threw back the initial Norman invasion and retained their independence until Edward I's conquest two centuries later.

Within the British Isles, the greatest area of Norman influence, after England, was Ireland. Norman forces first landed in Ireland in May 1169, called to act as mercenaries for the king of Leinster. More Normans arrived in 1170, most notably Richard de Clare, 'Strongbow'. While the invasion proved militarily successful, bringing Ireland into the Angevin Empire, the Anglo-Normans who arrived in Ireland, after initially settling in ethnic enclaves called 'the Pale' in the east of the country (hence the expression 'beyond the pale'), married and merged into Irish culture, eventually becoming as committed to the country as the native Gaels. Norman influence in Ireland can be traced through the many surnames having Norman roots, including all those with the prefix 'Fitz', Barry, Burke, D'Arcy, Treacy and Lacy. What had started out as a roving group of Viking raiders and pillagers had come a long way, and forever altered the history of Europe and the wider world.

Warrior countess

Among the contending powers in southern Italy were the Lombards. To bring them onside, Robert Guiscard contracted marriage with Sikelgaita, the daughter of the Prince of Salerno, putting aside his previous wife to do so. It proved a splendid match. Sikelgaita was a remarkable woman, who had already studied at the medical school in Salerno, which was pioneering the treatment of illness as something to be diagnosed and cured, and according to the chroniclers she was as remarkable for her size and strength as for her learning. Once married to Robert, Sikelgaita took part in military campaigns – Robert trusted her so much that he left his wife to conduct the siege of Trani – and was one of his closest and most trusted councillors. At the Battle of Dyrrachium in 1081, Sikelgaita took to the field in full armour and rallied the Norman troops when they were retreating in disarray, riding after them and upbraiding them for their cowardice before taking a spear and leading them back to the battle. She also found time to bear Robert eight children. Following Robert's death in 1085, Sikelgaita was dowager duchess of their domains until her own death in 1090.



Sikelgaita, the remarkable Lombard princess, with her equally remarkable husband, Robert Guiscard

Defining moment

Shipwreck

25 November 1120

King Henry I set out from Normandy for England. Among the flotilla of vessels was the White Ship, carrying Henry's only legitimate son, William. Soon after it set sail, the White Ship hit a rock and sank, drowning all but one aboard. With only his daughter, Matilda, left to him, Henry made her his heir and arranged her marriage to Geoffrey Plantagenet, Count of Anjou. But when Henry died in 1135, many of his English barons refused to accept Matilda as their ruler, taking Stephen of Blois, Henry's nephew, as king. This began 20 years of civil war, known as the Anarchy.

Defining moment

Fall of Normandy

1204

From his father, Henry II, and his brother, Richard the Lionheart, King John inherited possessions that included England, Normandy, half of Ireland, Anjou and Aquitaine – a veritable empire. But possessing neither the political flair of his father nor the ferocious military skill of his brother, but with a surfeit of Plantagenet vices, John proceeded to lose almost all of it to King Philip Augustus of France. By 1204, even Normandy was gone.

May 1169

Invasion of Ireland
The first Norman mercenaries arrived in Ireland to support the deposed king of Leinster. In 1171, Richard de Clare, 'Strongbow', arrived, followed six months later by King Henry II. The long English involvement in Ireland had begun.

1174

Beauty in stone
In Sicily, King William II commissioned the building of the great cathedral in Monreale. The church blended Norman, Byzantine and Muslim architectural styles into a dazzling synthesis.

1191

Conquest of Cyprus
Almost by accident, while on his way to the Holy Land as part of the Third Crusade, Richard the Lionheart conquered Cyprus, establishing Anglo-Norman rule on the island that ensured the island remained in Christian hands for centuries afterwards.

1194

Loss of Sicily
The last Norman ruler of Sicily, William II, died childless, leaving the kingdom to his aunt, Constance, wife of the Holy Roman Emperor Henry VI. A rebellion by other claimants was suppressed and in 1194 the Kingdom of Sicily passed into the rulership of the House of Hohenstaufen.

The Siege of Antioch

Norman commanders largely led this epic siege in the Levant in 1097-98, when First Crusade forces fought to secure the road to Jerusalem

The First Crusade was the bloody beginning of a theologically based military movement that changed the course of history, and whose effects we still live with today. When European Christian warriors launched campaigns to wrest control of Jerusalem and the Holy Land from Muslim control, they had no idea they were sowing divisions that would poison East-West relations into the 21st century. That dark legacy hints at what a huge movement the Crusades were, and Norman knights spearheaded the first Crusades into the Levant.

The dramatic Siege of Antioch was the decisive engagement that marked the arrival of the First Crusade. In October 1097, tens of thousands of European Crusaders arrived at the gates of Antioch (now Antakya in Turkey). They had previously marched through enemy Seljuk lands in Anatolia and captured Edessa in Upper Mesopotamia. Antioch was the strategic nut the Crusaders had to crack if they were to proceed towards Jerusalem.

Antioch was important for Christians. The saints Peter, Paul and Barnabas had formed the first Christian community there, and the patriarch of the city rivalled both Jerusalem and Constantinople in authority. Even the word 'Christian' was first used in Antioch. It was also strategically important. The city controlled the route from Asia Minor into Syria and had kilometres of walls and hundreds of towers. The terrain meant that Antioch could never be fully surrounded, and it had an excellent water supply. In short, the Byzantine-built defences surrounding the city were considered impregnable, and it had only fallen to Muslim Turks in 1085 through treachery.

Among the besieging Crusaders were several prominent Normans: Bohemond of Taranto, Robert, Duke of Normandy, and Tancred de Hauteville. Bohemond and Raymond of Toulouse each commanded a section of the blockading lines. They came under constant attack from the Turkish garrison over the next four months, and the rulers of Damascus and Aleppo also attempted to break the siege. These attacks were driven off, but over the winter of 1097-98 the besiegers ran out of food faster than the besieged, and thousands of the poorer Crusaders starved to death.

Some relief materialised when a Byzantine fleet (which was led by Edgar Ætheling, an exiled Anglo-Saxon claimant to the English throne) arrived with much-needed supplies for the Crusaders in the spring. In May, word reached the besiegers that Kerbogha, Atabeg of Mosul, was marching to liberate the city. The Crusaders' only hope was to take Antioch, but more Crusaders deserted, including Stephen of Blois, William the Conqueror's son-in-law.

> The ancient Greek city of Antioch became a Norman seat of power in the Levant for over 150 years

The day after Blois' desertion, the Crusaders achieved a major breakthrough. Like the siege of 1085, Bohemond's spies made contact with a traitor who would let them into Antioch. Firouz was an Armenian armourer who wanted revenge against his commanding officer at the Tower of the Two Sisters. He offered to let the besiegers in for money. Bohemond took this information and informed the Crusaders that he wanted to rule Antioch if the operation succeeded.

Firouz let Bohemond's Norman troops in through a window, and the Crusaders rampaged across the city, killing all in their path. But they soon discovered to their horror that there was almost no food left in Antioch. 20,000 Crusaders were now starving to death within the city walls (one in five is said to have perished), and Kerbogha's army was coming. The besiegers had become the besieged and awaited relief from a Byzantine army led by Tatikios. Unfortunately, Tatikios encountered Stephen of Blois en route, who informed him the Crusaders had probably failed at Antioch. Tatikios turned back and the Crusaders were left to their miserable fate.

By June 1098, the Crusaders were on the cusp of destruction, but salvation was soon at hand. On 14 June, a crusading peasant called Peter Bartholomew 'discovered' the Holy Lance in Antioch Cathedral, and Crusader morale got a significant and necessary boost. The remnants of the army then staggered out of Antioch on 28 June to face Kerbogha's newly arrived force. They saw white-clad cavalry in the distance that they mistook for charging Christian saints. In reality, the distant soldiers were Kerbogha's disunited and deserting army, which disintegrated before the Crusaders. The Crusaders scattered the remaining Muslim cavalry. Bohemond then rushed back into the city and occupied the citadel. He declared himself prince of Antioch and a Norman-led principality was established.

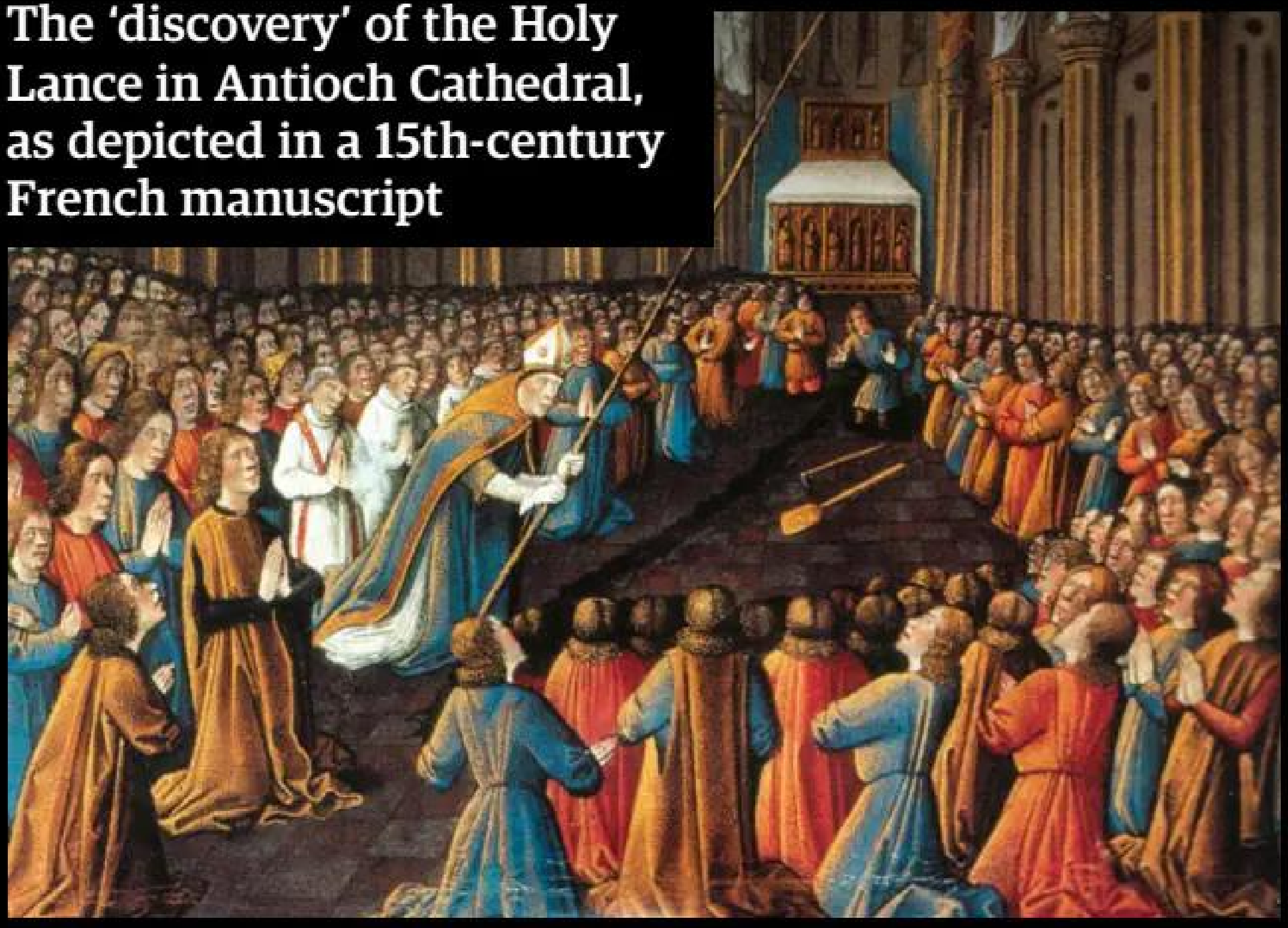
The First Crusade could now continue, and Jerusalem fell in July 1099. Bohemond's Antioch became a powerful Crusader state whose Christian settlers were mostly of Norman origin. It survived for over 150 years, until 1268.

The discovery of the Holy Lance

One of the most famous turning points of the siege was the supposed miracle of the discovery of the Holy Lance within the city. The lance was reputedly the weapon that was used to pierce the side of Jesus Christ as he hung on the cross during his crucifixion.

On 10 June 1098, a shabby French peasant called Peter Bartholomew claimed that he'd had a vision of Saint Andrew, who revealed that the lance was buried in Antioch's cathedral. Raymond of Toulouse and the bishop of Le Puy ordered an excavation of the cathedral on 14 June, but nothing was found until Bartholomew leapt into the dug pit and triumphantly pulled out a rod of iron. This was claimed to be the Holy Lance, and when the Crusaders marched out to face Kerbogha's army they carried the relic with them.

Many Crusaders attributed their victory to the Holy Lance, and it became a symbol of what they considered to be a sign that God was with them. However, not all were convinced that the Holy Lance was genuine, especially considering Bartholomew's reputation for drinking and womanising. The most prominent sceptic was Bohemond, who declared, "Let Count Raymond and his foolish crowd assign the victory to the Lance." Tellingly, it was Bohemond who used the distraction of the lance and other attributed 'miracles' to quickly assert control over Antioch and claim it for himself.



The 'discovery' of the Holy Lance in Antioch Cathedral, as depicted in a 15th-century French manuscript

Robert Curthose, Duke of Normandy, fighting at the Siege of Antioch. William the Conqueror's eldest son was the most prominent Norman at the siege

Norman warriors

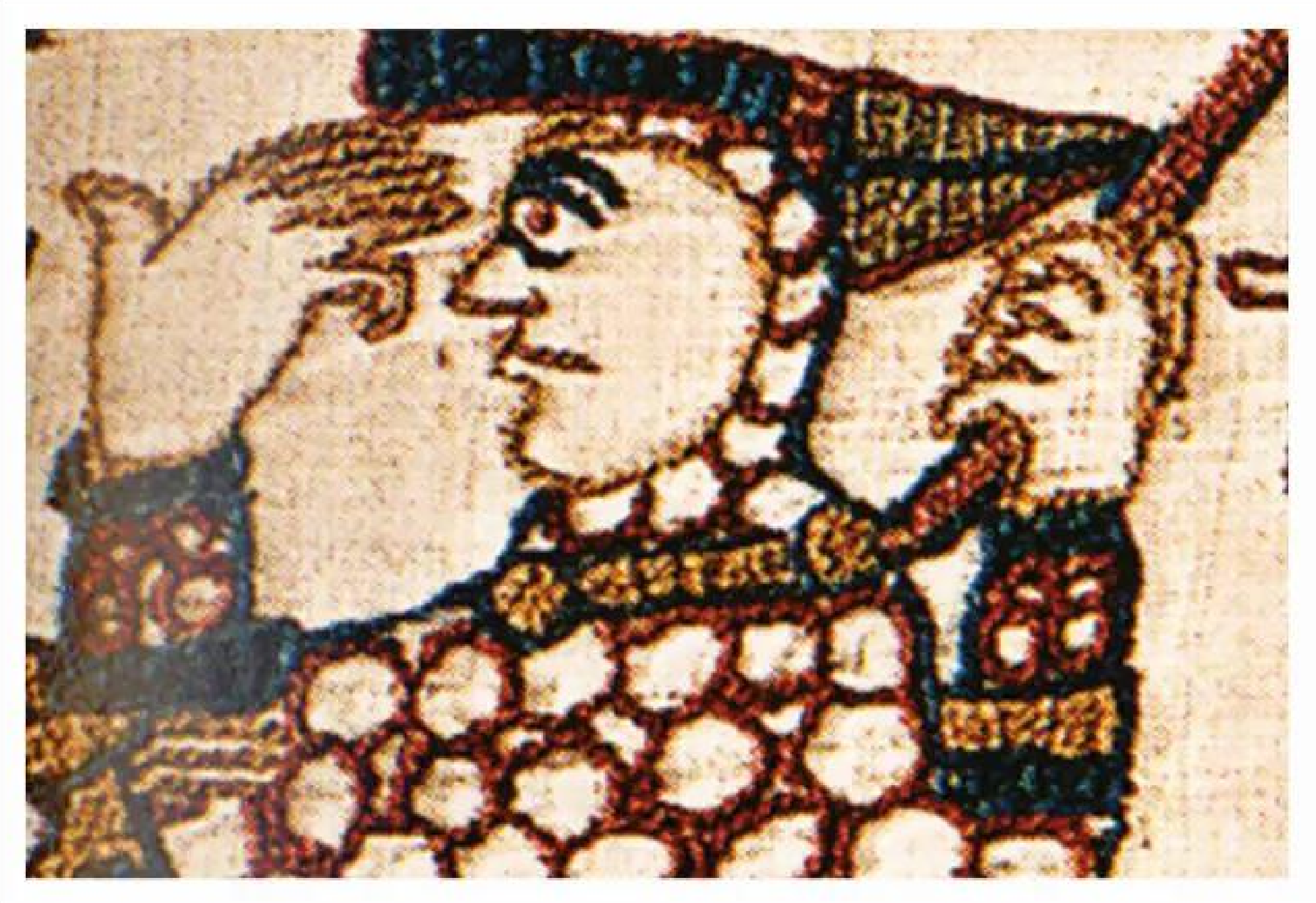
These formidable warlords included Vikings, mercenaries, kings and crusaders, who spread their influence across Europe and the Near East

William I 1028-87

The Norman 'Bastard' who turned into the 'Conqueror' of England

By far the most successful and decisive of all the Norman warriors, William transformed his position from the ruler of a provincial duchy to the monarch of one of the most sophisticated kingdoms in Europe.

Born at Falaise, he was the illegitimate son of Robert I, Duke of Normandy and his mistress Herleva. William inherited the duchy as a child. He grew up in an insecure atmosphere where several of his guardians were killed and William's own life was constantly in danger. His childhood turned him into a ruthless ruler, and in 1047 William asserted his authority by crushing rebels at the Battle of Val-ès-Dunes. After mercilessly sacking towns such as Alençon, William used the power of his sword to strengthen his position in Normandy, before turning his eyes towards England.

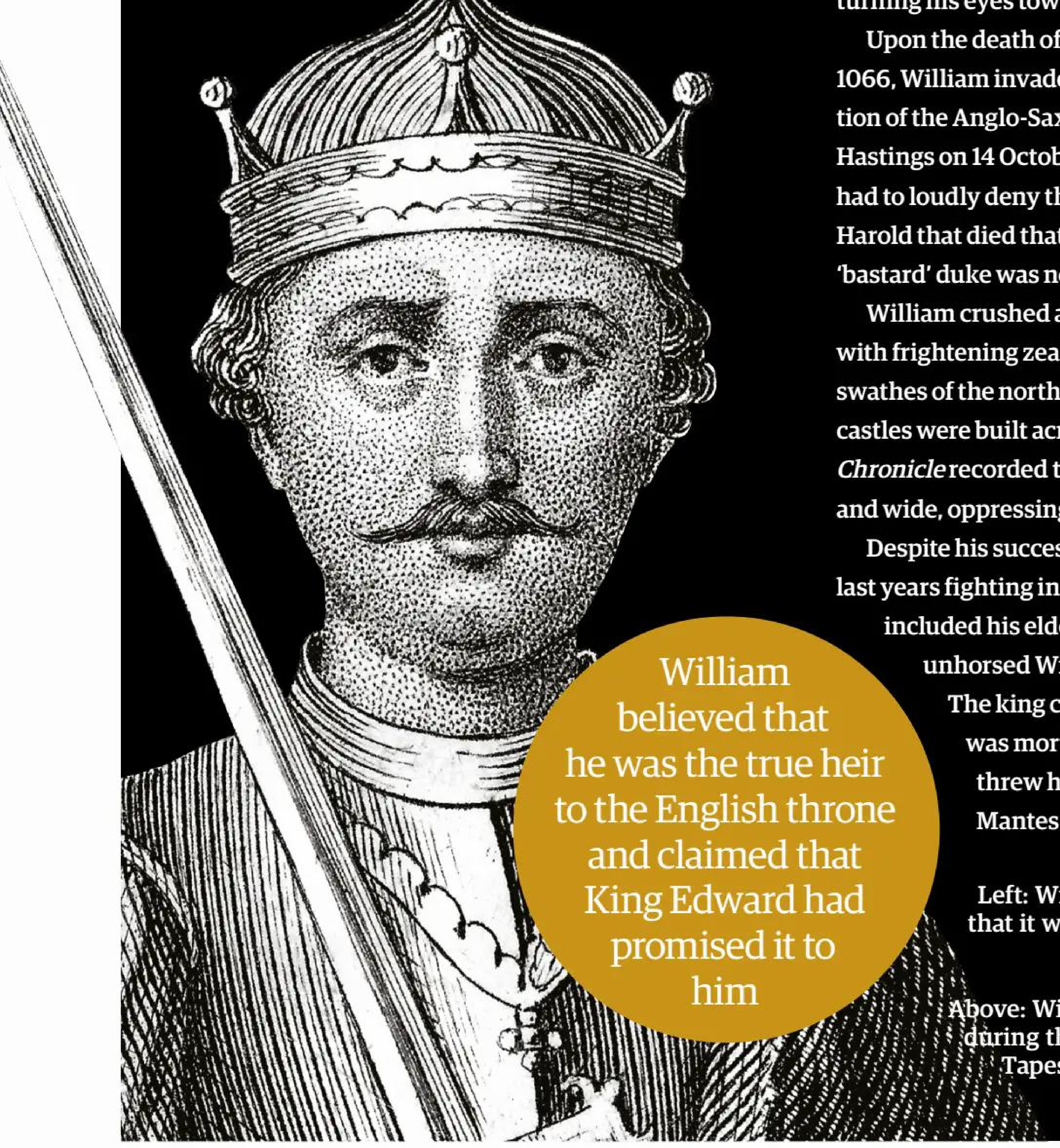


Upon the death of King Edward the Confessor in 1066, William invaded England after the swift coronation of the Anglo-Saxon Harold II. He won the Battle of Hastings on 14 October 1066, in a hard contest where he had to loudly deny that he had been killed. In fact, it was Harold that died that day, and the previously mocked 'bastard' duke was now king of England.

William crushed all English opposition to his rule with frightening zeal. His soldiers destroyed vast swathes of the north of England, and around 500 castles were built across the kingdom. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* recorded that the Normans "built castles far and wide, oppressing the unhappy people".

Despite his success in England, William spent his last years fighting in Normandy against rebels that included his eldest son Robert. In 1079, Robert even unhorsed William in combat and wounded him. The king continued his suppressive wars and was mortally injured in 1087 when his horse threw him near the smouldering ruins of Mantes, a town he had just sacked.

William believed that he was the true heir to the English throne and claimed that King Edward had promised it to him



Left: William's physical strength was such that it was said he could jump onto a horse wearing full armour without effort

Above: William is depicted lifting his helmet during the Battle of Hastings in the Bayeux Tapestry. This is the only contemporary likeness of him

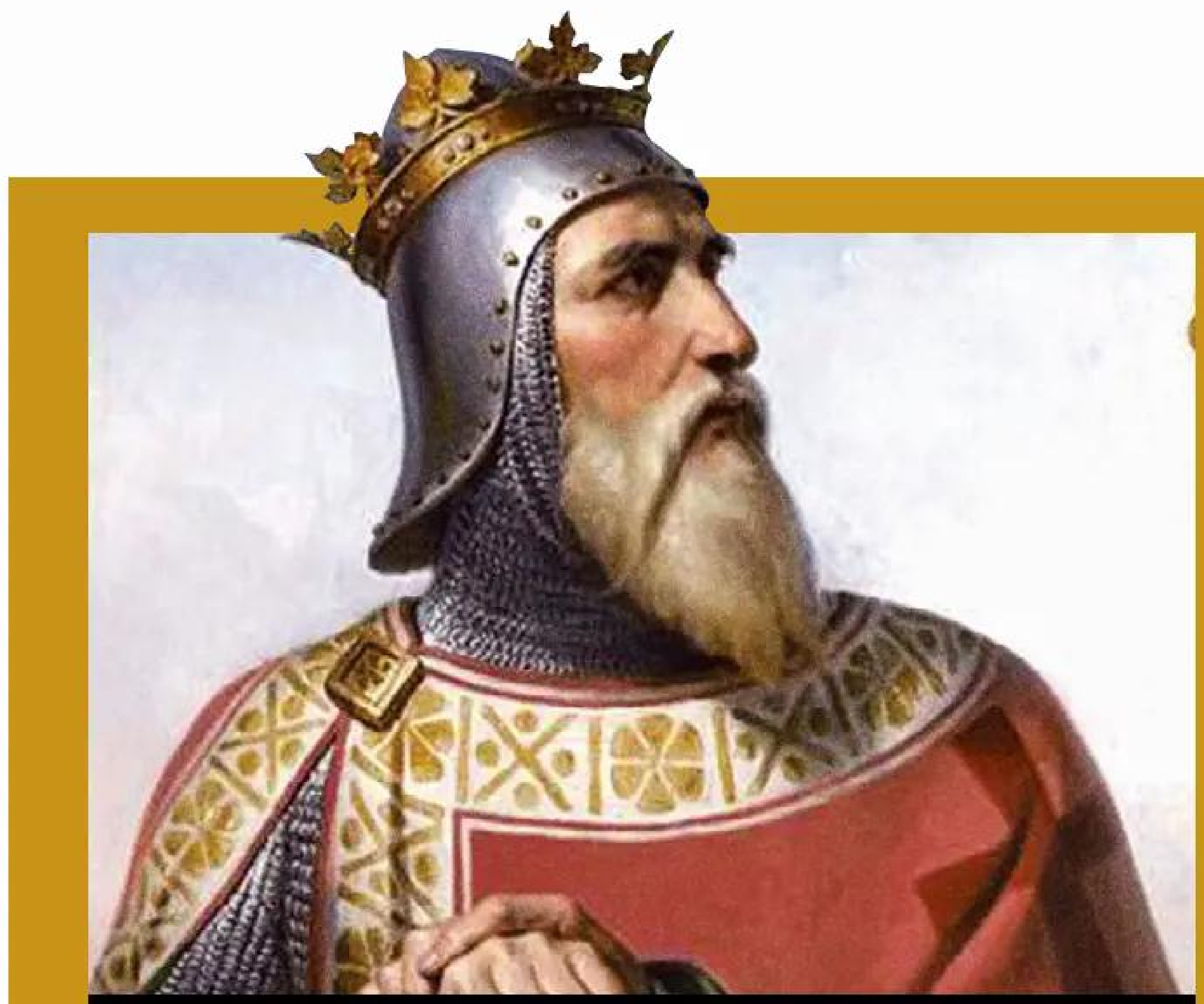
Rollo 860-930

The Viking founder of the Duchy of Normandy

Rollo's origins are uncertain, and he has variously been described as a Dane or Norwegian. This Scandinavian warrior was a pirate who raided England, Scotland and Flanders before attacking France with a Danish army. Rollo established himself in the vicinity of the Seine River and besieged Paris. The king of the West Franks, Charles III (otherwise known as 'the Simple') was able to prevent Rollo from taking Paris but eventually went into negotiations with him.

By the terms of the Treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte in 911, Charles allowed Rollo and his Viking followers to settle in a part of Neustria, which formed part of his western kingdom. In exchange, Rollo agreed to end his raiding and acknowledged Charles as his lord. The land that Rollo's Vikings settled on became known as 'Normandy', in reference to its population of 'Northmen'. Rollo ruled Normandy as the Count of Rouen. His Viking descendents later became dukes of Normandy and kings of England.

A 19th-century statue of Rollo in Rouen. His Viking followers settled in Normandy but quickly adopted the French language, customs and Christian religion



At various times in his life Guiscard held the titles of Count and Duke of Apulia and Calabria, Duke of Sicily and even the Prince of Benevento

Robert Guiscard de Hauteville 1015-85

The Norman scourge of the pope and Byzantine Empire

Born in Normandy, Guiscard travelled to southern Italy, where his older brothers had literally carved out successful careers as mercenaries and established themselves as powerful warlords. Because of his early reputation as a brigand, Robert was nicknamed 'Guiscard', which meant 'Crafty One' (It's also translated variously as 'Fox' or 'Weasel').

Guiscard helped win a notable victory against a papal army at the Battle of Civitate in 1053 and assisted in conquering the remaining Byzantine lands in Italy. He became an ally of the pope and was instrumental in securing the Norman conquest of Sicily in 1072. From 1080, Guiscard began to attack the Byzantine Empire itself and crossed the Aegean Sea with a huge fleet. He defeated Emperor Alexios I Komnenos at the Battle of Dyrrhachium and then returned to Italy. Guiscard sacked Rome and rescued Pope Gregory VII before installing him in a palace at Salerno.

Guiscard's astonishing career ended when he captured Corfu in 1085. While wintering in Greece, an epidemic spread through the Norman army that killed many, including Guiscard.

Bohemond I

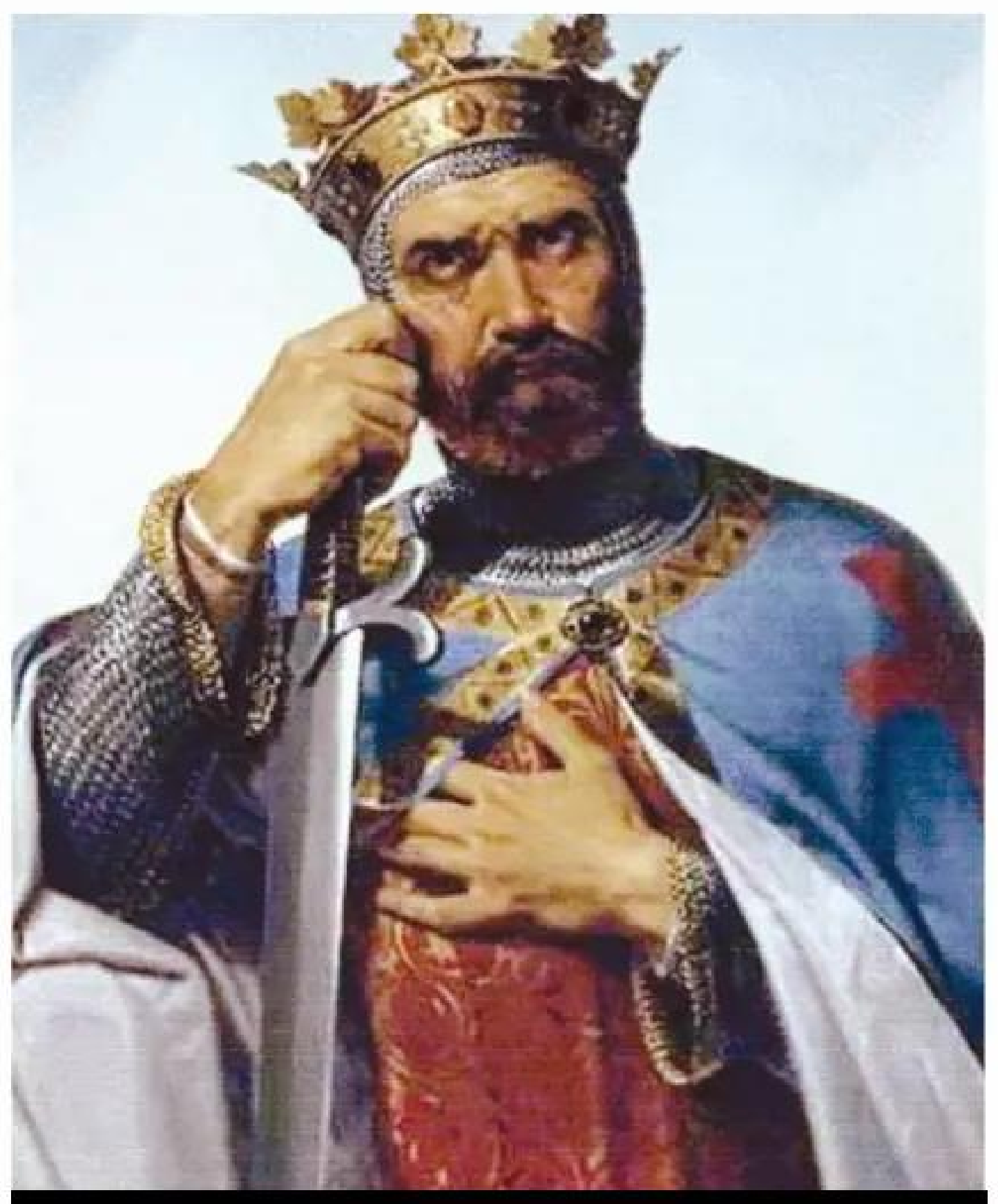
1054-1111

The crusading founder of the Principality of Antioch

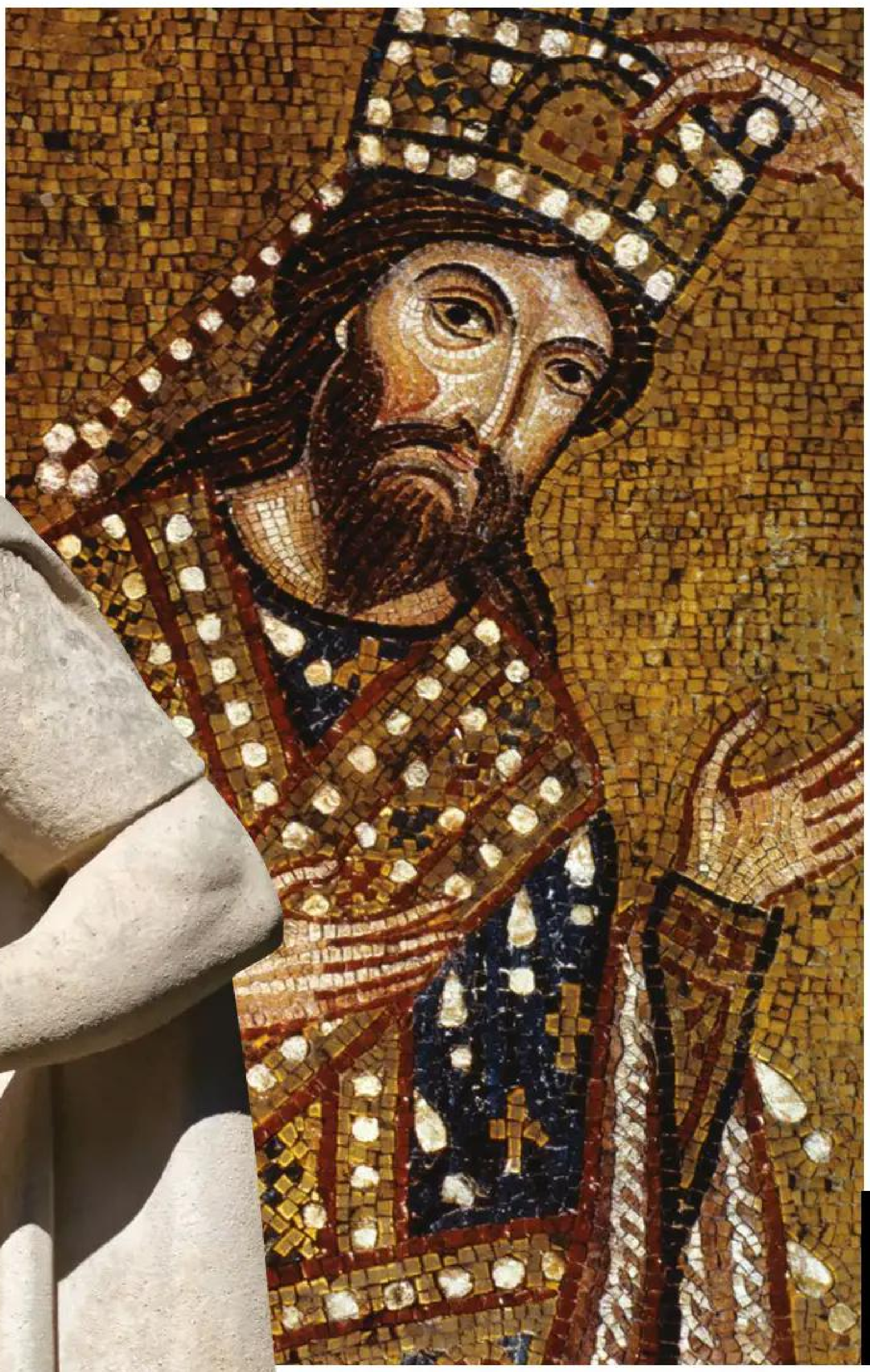
The eldest son of Robert Guiscard, Bohemond learned the art of war from his father and fought against the Byzantine emperor Alexios I Komnenos, notably at the Siege of Durazzo. Bohemond's victories against the Byzantines resulted in the capture of most of Macedonia and Thessaly, but he had to return to Italy for financial reasons.

When the First Crusade was declared in 1095 Bohemond led a small force of Normans across Greece and Anatolia, before assuming command of the Crusaders at the Siege of Antioch. He was instrumental in the city's fall in June 1098 and then took control of its governance. Bohemond was captured by Muslims in 1100 and imprisoned in chains until 1103.

In 1106, Bohemond married the daughter of the king of France, but lost a war against the Byzantines. He was forced to accept being a vassal of the Byzantine emperor, but he retained control of Antioch until his death. The Norman-established Principality of Antioch would survive until 1268.



'Bohemond' was a nickname that described the crusader's tall height and knightly strength. He was described by a contemporary as a "wonderful spectacle"



Roger II

1095-1154

The first Norman monarch of a unified kingdom of Sicily

The son of Roger I, Count of Sicily, at Mileto, the young Roger was taught by Greek and Arab tutors and could speak several languages. Knighted in 1112 in the Palazzo dei Normanni (Palace of the Normans) at Palermo, Roger administered his Sicilian territories and became known for his diplomatic skills. After supporting Antipope Anacletus II against Pope Innocent II, Roger was crowned king of Sicily in December 1130. After defeating Pope Innocent in battle, Roger forced the pope to recognise his kingdom, but was defeated twice at the battles of Nocera and Rignano.

Nevertheless, Roger was able to consolidate his power and created a navy that briefly captured much of Tunisia and sailed up the Bosporus to attack Constantinople. He also presided over an intellectual court that administered tolerance over the various peoples and religions of Sicily.

This Norman king was the first to engender a sense of unified Sicilian identity among the islanders.

Roger II's Sicilian court reflected the multicultural life of Sicily, which was ruled by Normans but influenced by Latin, Byzantine, Greek and Arab cultures

Richard de Clare, 2nd Earl of Pembroke

1130-76

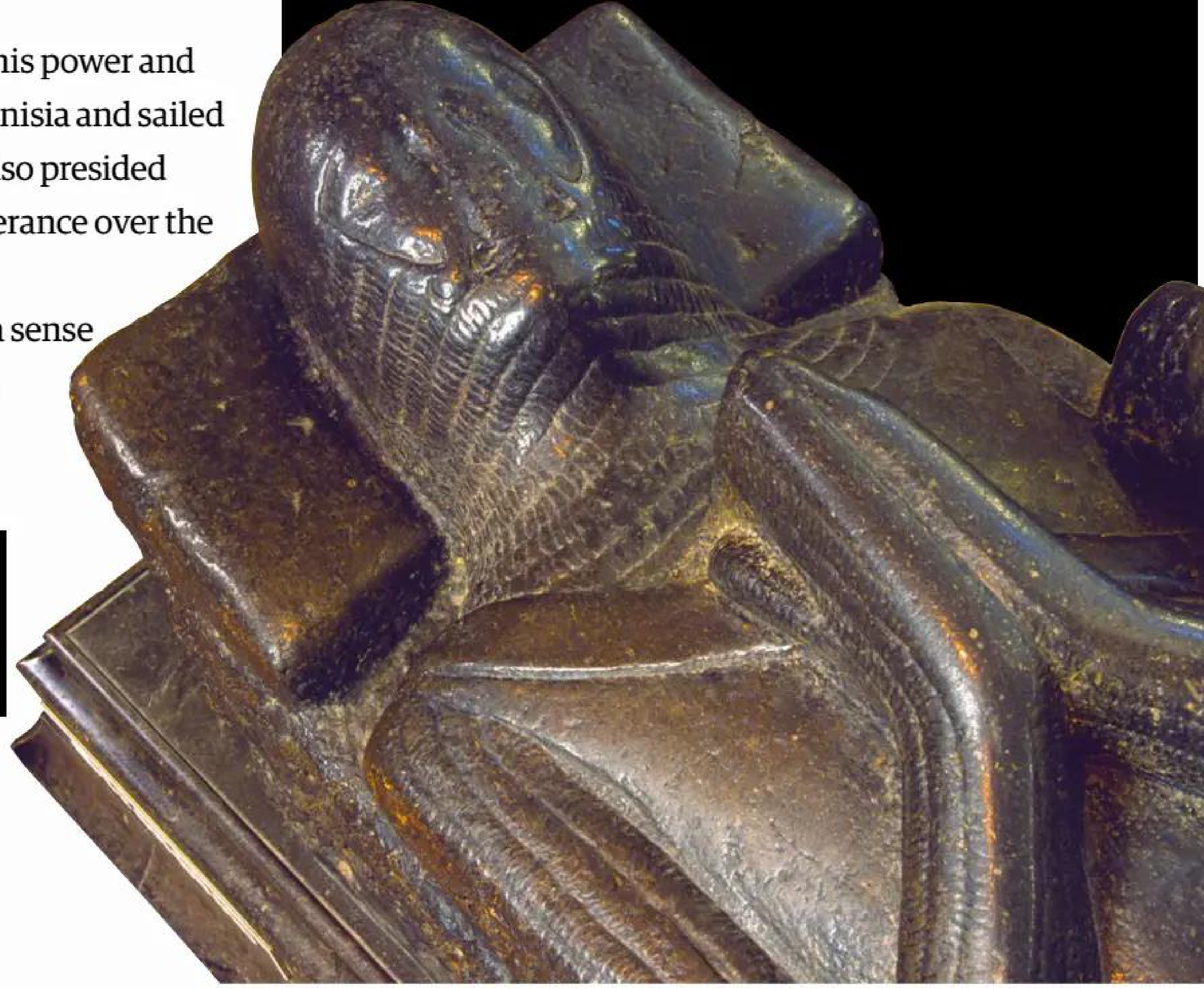
The invader of Ireland who was popularly known as 'Strongbow'

Born in England, Richard de Clare inherited his father's southern Welsh estates as the earl of Pembroke. In 1168, Pembroke agreed to aid the exiled King Diarmait Mac Murchada of Leinster to retake his Irish kingdom.

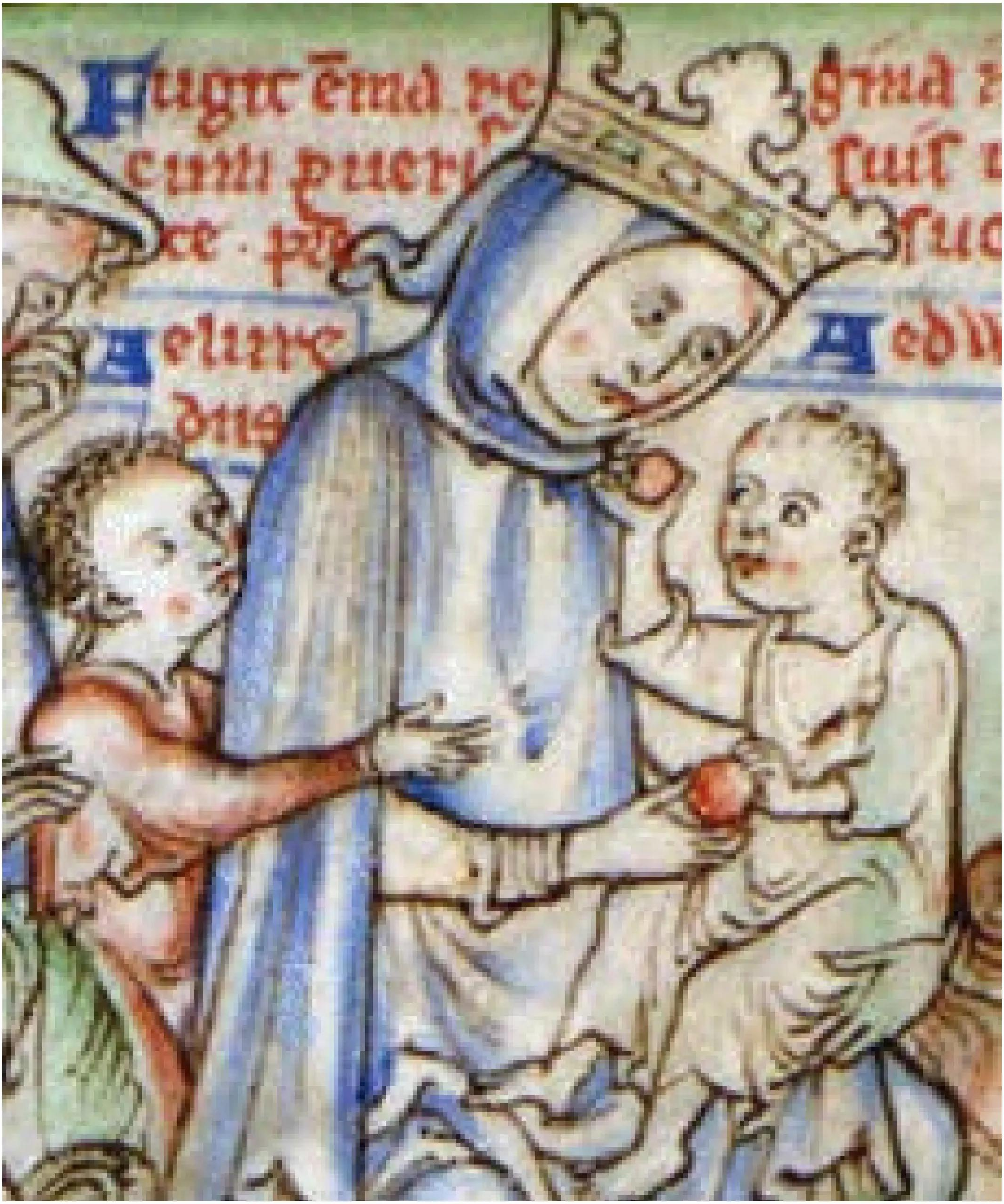
Diarmait returned to Leinster with his Norman allies in 1169, with Pembroke arriving the following year. This invasion was authorised by Pope Adrian IV and backed by Henry II of England. Pembroke captured Waterford, married Diarmait's daughter Aoife and secured the succession of the kingdom of Wexford for himself. He was besieged by the king of Connacht at Dublin but managed to rout the besiegers in battle. His nickname 'Strongbow' was probably a mistranslation of his lesser Welsh earldom of Striguil.

Henry II arrived in Ireland himself in 1171 and forced Pembroke to acknowledge his royal authority. After helping Henry suppress a rebellion in Normandy, Pembroke was granted Wexford, Waterford and Dublin. At his death, Pembroke was the recognised ruler of Leinster, and Anglo-Norman influence in Ireland was permanently entrenched.

Pembroke's alleged effigy in Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin. The popular English cider brand 'Strongbow' is named after him



Images: Alamy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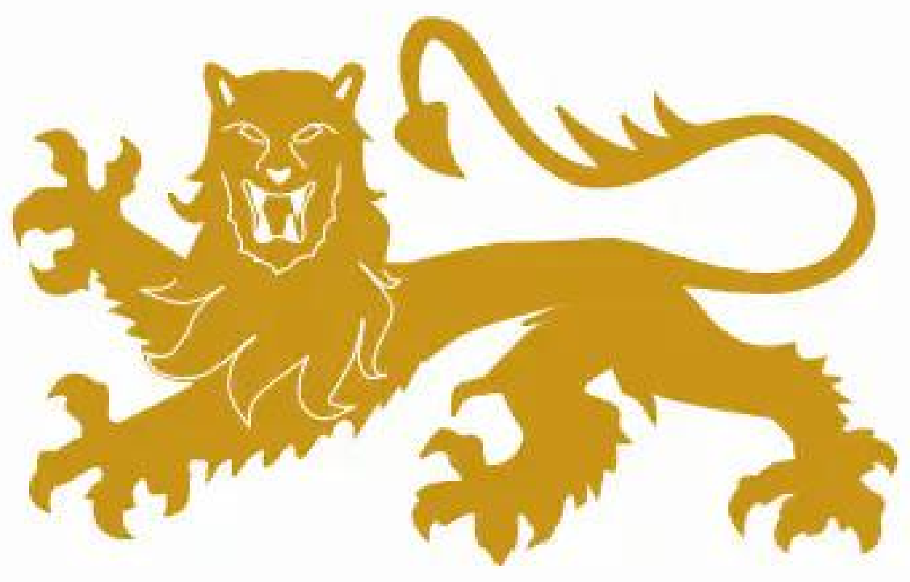


The queen who ruled kings

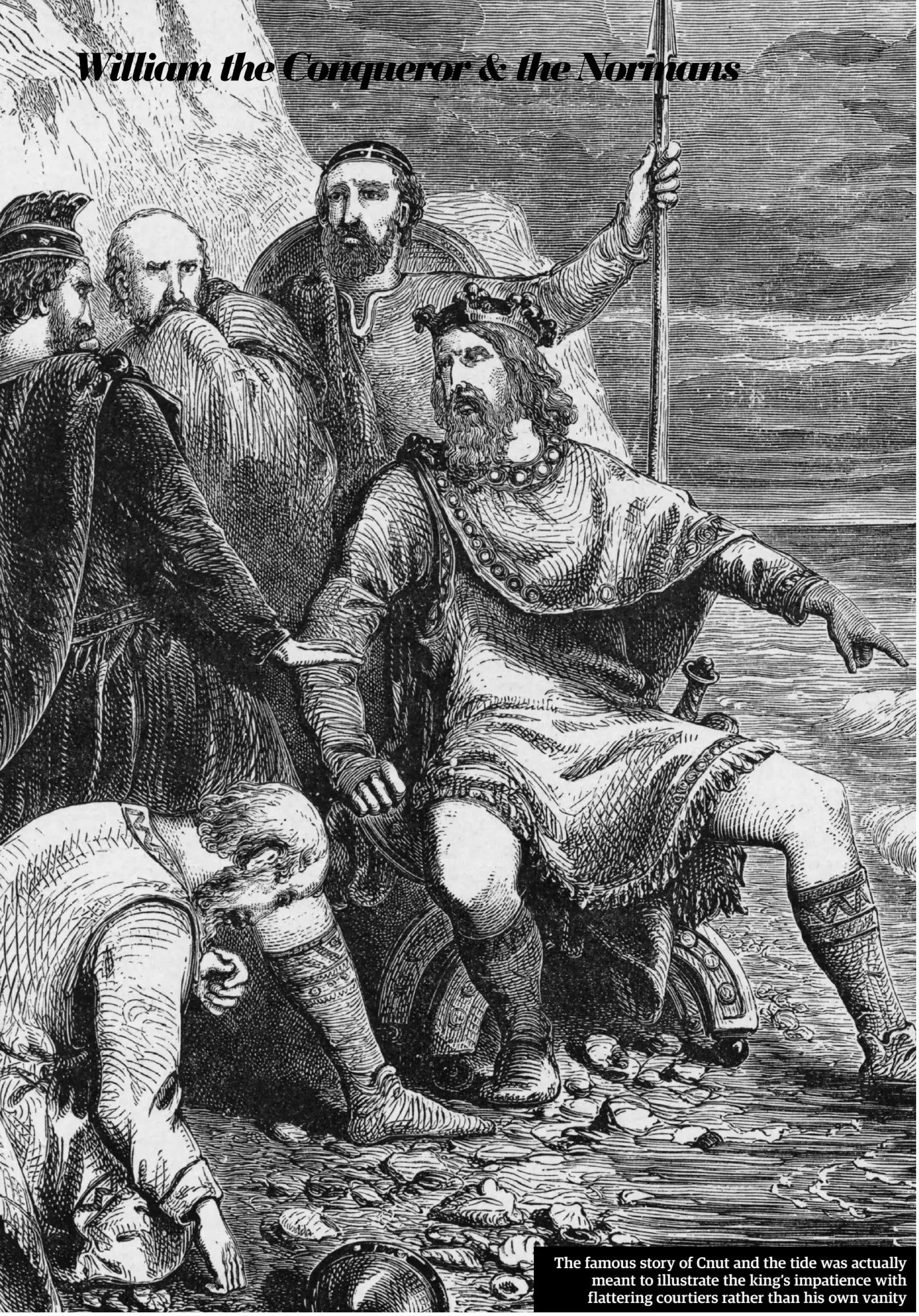
For 50 years, one woman stood at the centre of the affairs of three kingdoms

For 50 years, one woman stood at the centre of power and politics in northern Europe, her influence stretching from Normandy across the Channel to England and over the North Sea to Denmark and Scandinavia. Wife to two kings, mother to two more, Emma, daughter of Richard the Fearless, Duke of Normandy, was a pivotal figure in English, Norman and Scandinavian history. What is also clear is that Emma was no helpless female pawn in these dynastic and family struggles, but one of the most active players in the game. Emma made kings and brought them down; she legitimised rulers and sidelined others, and through it all she displayed the keenest sense for public relations of any medieval queen. Not bad for the initially illegitimate daughter of what was still essentially a Viking duchy.

Emma was the great-aunt of William the Conqueror. This connection gave William a claim to the English throne

In 1002, in a further attempt to deny raiding Vikings a sanctuary port with their cousins across the Channel in Normandy, King Æthelred of England contracted marriage with the sister of Richard II, Duke of Normandy. Æthelred was 36, Emma probably in her late teens. But for the daughter of a duke to marry a king was huge step up for Emma. The young Emma was, however, stepping into a pit of conflicting interests: Æthelred had been married before, his first wife, Ælfgifu, having provided the king with six sons and at least three daughters. As part of the marriage negotiations, Emma's brother had apparently insisted that any children produced by Emma and Æthelred would rank higher in precedence than the sons of Ælfgifu and Æthelred – an arrangement hardly likely to find favour with those six growing boys and their relations. Nor could they have been too happy with Emma being given the Anglo-Saxon name of Ælfgifu on her arrival in England in a strange attempt to write their mother out of history.

While incompetent in all other regal matters, Æthelred was extremely potent in the production of royal heirs: with Emma, he had a further three children; two sons, Edward and Alfred, and a daughter, Goda, despite the chroniclers intimating that the marriage was not the happiest of royal unions. It can't have been easy for the supremely competent Emma to be married to such a bungler. They had only been married a few months when she saw this at first hand: on 13 November 1002, Æthelred ordered the massacre of all Danes living in England. Fatefully, one of those caught up in the St Brice's Day massacre was Gunhilde, sister of King Sweyn Forkbeard of Denmark. What had before been purely business – raiding and



The famous story of Cnut and the tide was actually meant to illustrate the king's impatience with flattering courtiers rather than his own vanity

plundering England – became deeply personal for the enraged king. During the following decade, Sweyn Forkbeard launched a series of devastating attacks on England, finally landing himself in 1013 and conquering the demoralised country.

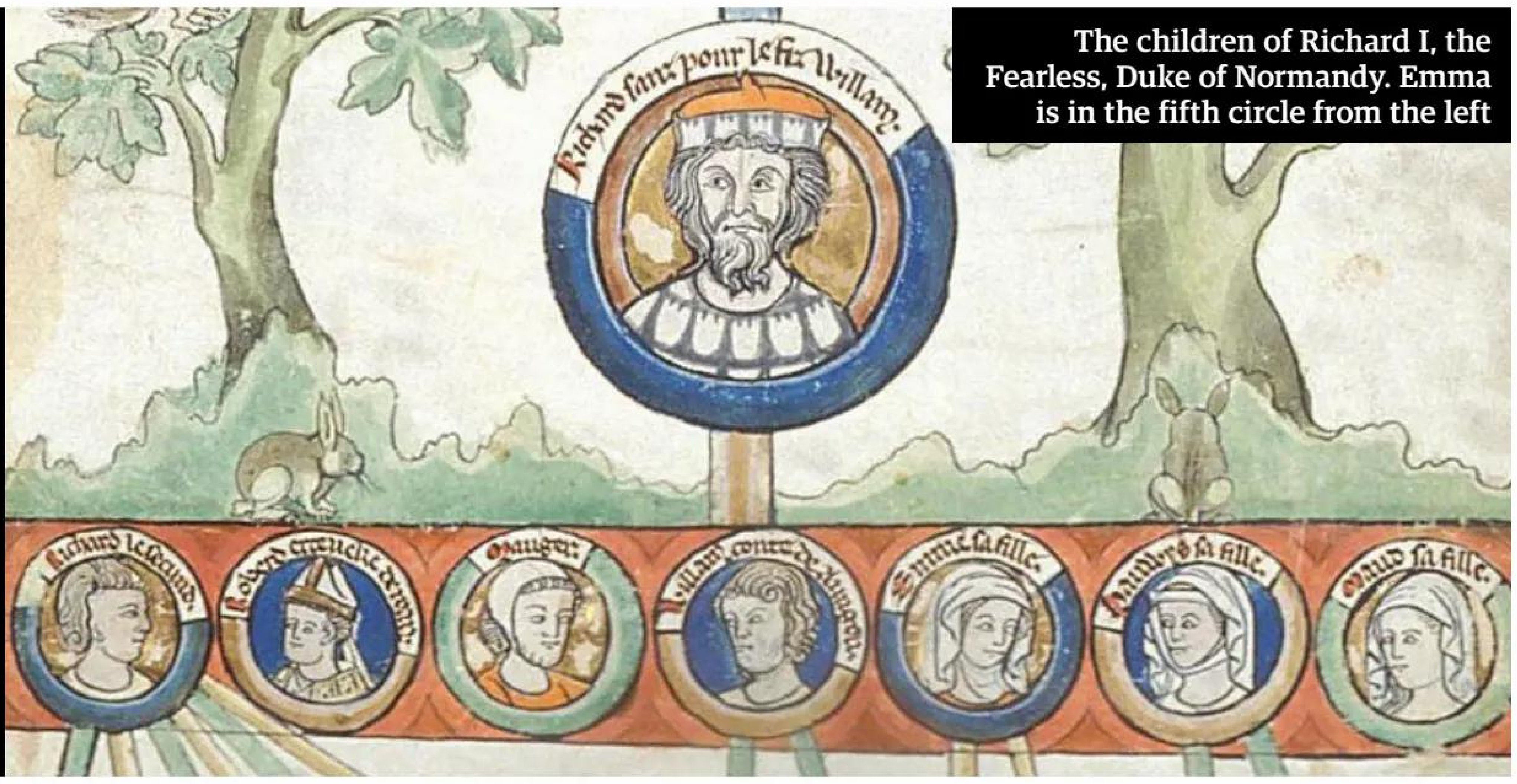
Æthelred fled. To Normandy. Emma and their sons had already left for sanctuary across the Channel, although the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* notes laconically that Emma travelled separately from husband and children. But having conquered England – a feat for which he gets little notice – King Sweyn Forkbeard died only five weeks into his reign, on 3 February 1014. The English nobility, who had abandoned Æthelred, invited him back on condition that he would amend his ways and, a most telling condition, rule them justly. Cnut, Sweyn's young son, attempted to hold on to the crown but had to flee. So, for the first and only time in his life, Æthelred made a triumphant return to England. But the king was soon back to his old, capricious ways, forcing his eldest son, Edmund, to open revolt. With England riven by civil strife, Cnut returned at the head of a fresh invading army in September 1015. It was Edmund, now named Ironside, who led the resistance against Cnut over the next year and a half, Æthelred finally doing his country a service by dying on 23 April 1016.

With Edmund, the son of her rival, leading the fight and her own sons having taken refuge back in Normandy, Emma was for the moment only a bystander to the events shaping history. But when Cnut and Edmund fought each other to a stalemate, only for Edmund to conveniently die after signing a peace treaty with the Dane, Emma was soon right back at the centre of things. For what better way for Cnut to signal his legitimacy as king of England than for him to make queen the woman who had, until so recently, been queen?

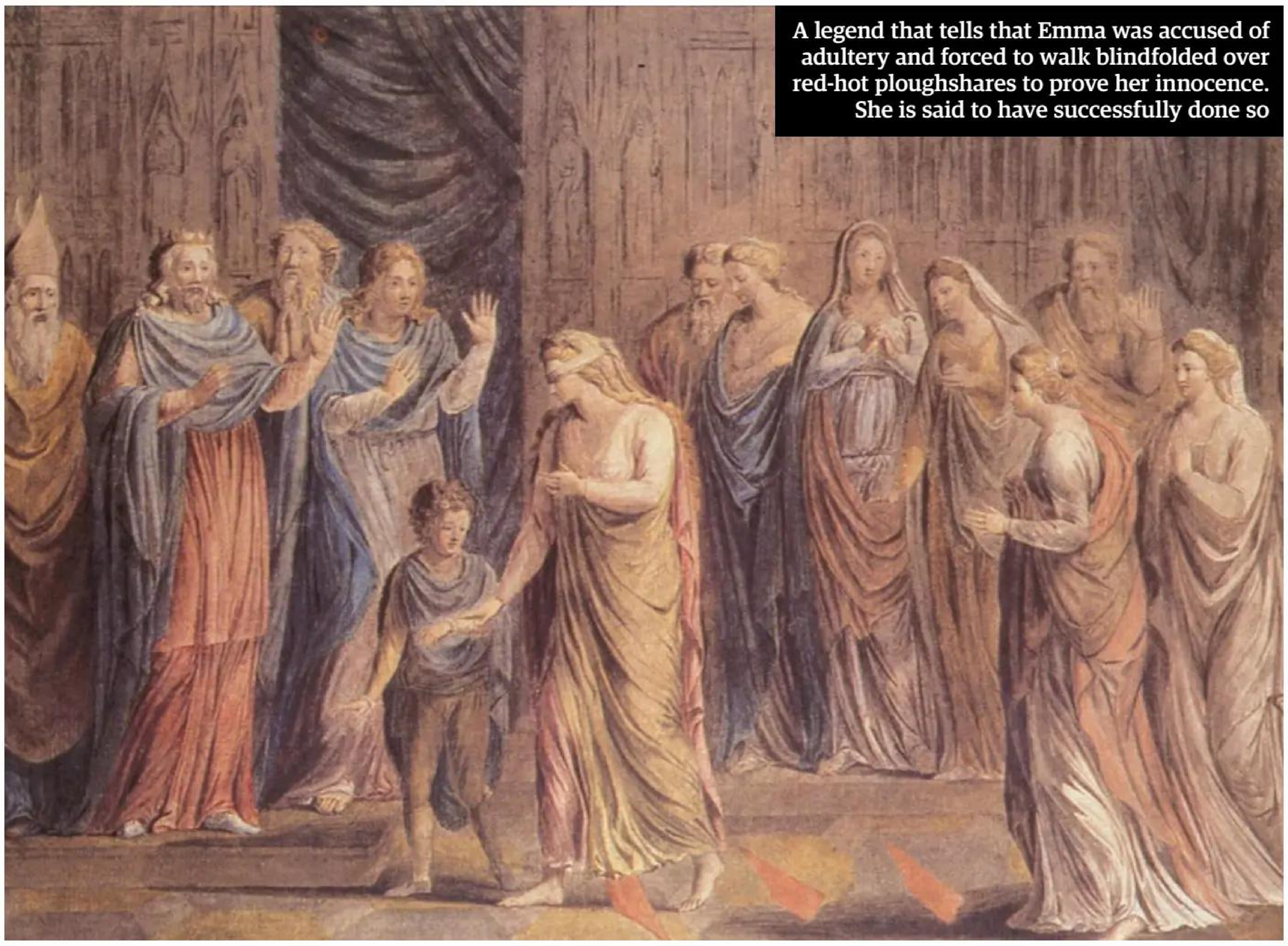
According to the account Emma later commissioned, Cnut sent emissaries to her in Normandy to woo her acceptance of his proposal. According to a Norman chronicler, Emma was captured when Cnut took London and had little choice in the matter. But whether a forced or willing bride, Emma soon turned the situation to her advantage: she was queen again. And, what's more, with Cnut as her husband, she would

Emma's early life

Emma was born in Normandy c.985. An indication of her initial lack of prospects is shown by the uncertainty over her date of birth and the scanty information about her early life. Her father, Richard, was Duke of Normandy and the grandson of the Duchy's founder, Rollo, the Viking who settled in France with the permission of Charles the Simple, king of France, around 918, on the proviso that the settled Northmen would guard the kingdom against their wandering kinsmen. Rollo's son and grandson, and their people, assimilated rapidly into France, adopting French names (William and Richard), speaking French rather than Norse, and becoming enthusiastic and devout Christians. But up to Emma's father, Richard, it was common practice for the dukes to marry in the 'Danish fashion' ("more danico" in Latin), a practice that allowed marriage to a woman of lower rank but the possibility to put her aside should a more high-ranking bride become available. The Church disapproved of the practice, however, and Richard eventually formalised his marriage. In practice, children of these unions were not yet disadvantaged in terms of inheritance, the most notable example of course being William himself.


Richard sanz pour le fitz Willam.
Richard le secund.
Mauger.
Emma sa fille.
Maud sa fille.

The children of Richard I, the Fearless, Duke of Normandy. Emma is in the fifth circle from the left



A legend that tells that Emma was accused of adultery and forced to walk blindfolded over red-hot ploughshares to prove her innocence. She is said to have successfully done so

become queen of a veritable North Sea empire, encompassing England, Denmark and Norway.

Leaving her sons, Edward and Alfred, in the care of her brother back in Normandy – as the sons of Æthelred and therefore direct claimants to the throne, the two boys would hardly be welcome at Cnut's court – Emma gave birth to a son, Harthacnut, from her union with Cnut. But the same problem as had attended her marriage to Æthelred applied to her union with Cnut: the king already had a wife, confusingly also called Ælfgifu, an Englishwoman from a prominent northern family, who had given birth to two sons. Although Cnut did not repudiate Ælfgifu, he accorded Emma high status at his court, her name frequently paired with that of the king.

But on 12 November 1035, Cnut died, throwing wide the question of succession. Emma threw her considerable political weight behind her son, Harthacnut, with the backing of Earl Godwin (father of the later King Harold), while Ælfgifu, together with the powerful northern English families that she came from, backed her son, Harold. But Emma was hampered by the non-appearance of Harthacnut, who was tied up in Denmark trying to secure his rule there, whereas Harold earned the nickname 'Harefoot' by rushing to London in the immediate aftermath of Cnut's death to claim the throne. The negotiations split the country between Harold and Harthacnut, with Emma holding Wessex until her son was able to arrive and claim his crown. But Harthacnut did not come – his rule in Denmark being threatened by Magnus Olafson, who had taken Norway – and Earl Godwin switched sides. With her power leaking away – Harold had already commandeered the most valuable of Cnut's treasures from her base in Winchester – and no sign of Harthacnut's arrival, Emma had to look elsewhere for new levers on power. And just across the Channel, she had two sons, Edward and Alfred, both with claims on the throne of England. Edward attempted a half-hearted invasion, but Alfred was captured by Earl Godwin, then taken to Harold Harefoot's men, who blinded him – thus disqualifying him from kingship. The blinding was botched: Alfred died. The relationship between Emma and Edward, never easy and usually distant, suffered further as a result of these twin debacles.

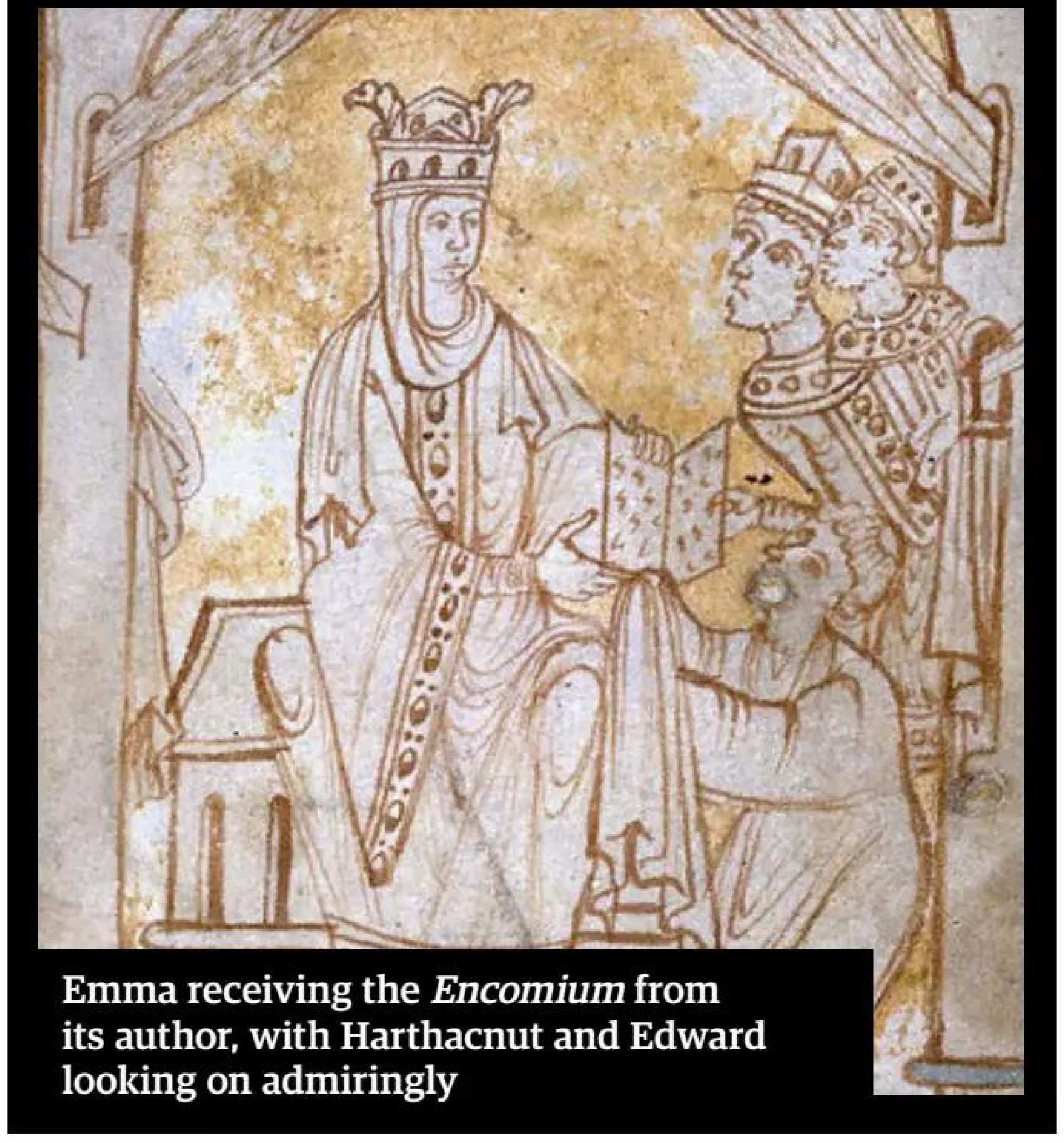
With Harold Harefoot now firmly in charge, Emma was forced to flee England, but she did not seek refuge in Normandy, to which Edward had returned, but in Flanders. With her prospects looking bleaker than they had for a long time, Emma was buoyed by the arrival in Bruges of Harthacnut. He had come to claim the English crown. This proved much easier than might have been expected, for Harold Harefoot died on 17 March 1040. He was only 24. Harthacnut sailed to England with Emma and, on 17 June 1040, they landed at Sandwich. Emma was queen once more.

However, Harthacnut's rule was unpopular: used to ruling as an autocrat in Denmark, Harthacnut did not take kindly to the English expectation that a king rule in consultation with his chief nobles. By 1041, Harthacnut was probably also suffering the debilitating effects of the illness that would eventually kill him. Realising that she needed to bolster her position, Emma arranged for the return of her son, Edward, who became king alongside Harthacnut. Harthacnut had not married and had no recognised children, so he may have acquiesced to his mother's wish that he be succeeded by his half-brother. In any event, Harthacnut died on 8 June 1042. Earl Godwin, the most powerful earl in the land, supported Edward's accession and on 8 April 1043, Emma's eldest son by Æthelred was consecrated king.

But, not unreasonably, Edward harboured a deep resentment against his mother. Having been crowned king, he moved against her in November of the same year, appearing in Winchester, Emma's power base, with his three most powerful earls, Godwin among them, where he expropriated Emma's most valuable treasures. Edward shifted the centre of political power in England from Winchester to Westminster. Emma stayed in Winchester, and did eventually recover favour with her son, but she was decisively sidelined in the power struggles in England. From here on in, it was a contest between Edward and the Earl Godwin and his family, a contest that came to its bloody resolution at Hastings. Emma died on 7 March 1052. She was buried beside Cnut and Harthacnut in Winchester: wife to two kings and mother to two more. Few people have played such a central role, for so long, in English affairs.

Public relations, Emma style

Emma, always subject to gossip from rivals and competitors, was not one to sit back and allow her name to be perjured. While Harthacnut pursued his reign, she commissioned a monk from Flanders to write her biography, the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*. There were many whispers against Emma's role in the blinding and death of her son, Alfred, and the *Encomium* was designed to counter that with her own account of what had brought Alfred on his ill-fated trip to England – a forged letter in her name sent by Harold Harefoot – and the insinuation that Harold Harefoot wasn't even Cnut's son, but a baby bought in by Ælfgifu when she was unable to get pregnant by Cnut. With Harthacnut on the throne, the *Encomium* also passes in silence over Emma's first queenship, as wife to King Æthelred, while casting Emma's marriage to Cnut in ideal terms. The single surviving manuscript of the *Encomium* has a front-page illustration of Emma herself receiving the book from the kneeling writer, with her reigning sons, Harthacnut and Edward, relegated to minor positions on the margin of the picture.



Emma receiving the *Encomium* from its author, with Harthacnut and Edward looking on admiringly

The pious king with no heir

Edward brought the country stability and prosperity, but his failure to secure the succession to the throne left England open to war

Edward was born in to a country being torn apart by raiders and invaders. He was the eldest son of King Æthelred and his second wife, Emma of Normandy. Æthelred had already produced at least six sons by his first wife, so he was hardly in need of further heirs. But what he did need was to secure the ports across the Channel from Viking raiders.

The Normans were descendants of Vikings who had settled in the valley of the lower Seine in the early-10th century and been granted the land by Charles the Simple of France in return for securing his northern borders against Viking raiders.

> Edward also had a sister, Godgifu, who married Drogo, count of the Vexin, and then, when Drogo died, Eustace, count of Boulogne

A century later, with the Norman duchy well established, Æthelred attempted to do the same for his own realm. The Vikings who were harrying England were using the ports of Normandy as safe havens and they found a ready welcome among their Norman cousins. But the widowed Æthelred arranged a marriage with Emma, the sister of Richard the Good, duke of Normandy, in 1002. Much good did it do him or England. Though the Normans largely kept their side of the bargain, Æthelred had made such a hash of defending England that, when Sweyn Forkbeard landed with his invading army in 1013, the demoralised defenders offered barely any resistance. In a telling comment on what she thought of her husband, Emma fled to Normandy with her two sons by Æthelred - Edward had a younger brother called Alfred - leaving the king behind. Æthelred himself followed later, only to return to England in 1014 when Sweyn Forkbeard died. His Viking army declared for Forkbeard's son, Cnut, but Æthelred's eldest son, Edmund Ironside, led the fightback and Æthelred was invited back - whereupon the resistance promptly crumbled again. On 23 April 1016, Æthelred finally did something for his country: he died. Edmund renewed the resistance to the Danish takeover, fighting Cnut through the summer and autumn and only losing the decisive battle through the treachery of Æthelred's chief adviser, Eadric Streona. Edmund died soon afterwards and Edward, who had been part of his half brother's army, fled into exile once more. With Cnut now secure on the throne, Edward can't have expected to return.

His prospects declined even further when Cnut invited Edward's mother, Emma, to come back over the Channel and take a second bite at being queen. Emma promptly accepted and, leaving her sons behind in Normandy, married Cnut - despite him already having sons through his handfast wife,

EDWARD, CALLED 'THE CONFESSOR' FOLLOWING HIS CANONISATION IN 116

c.1004 – 5 January 1066

Brief Bio

The exile who returned to claim the throne kept England united and peaceful for nearly a quarter of a century. But Edward's failure to establish a clear successor led to the Norman Conquest.

Ælfgifu. As part of the marriage settlement, Emma probably extracted the promise that the children of her marriage would have priority in succession and so she set about producing another heir: Harthacnut was born in 1018.

All but abandoned by their mother, Edward and his brother Alfred grew to manhood in Normandy. With Cnut so dominant a king – and having three sons by two wives – there was little prospect of the young men ever returning to the country of their birth. In most such cases, they would have slipped into obscurity, forgotten by history. But Cnut died on 12 November 1035 when he was about 40.

Emma immediately swung into action, supporting her son, Harthacnut, for the succession. But the problem was that Harthacnut was detained in Denmark as he sought to establish his rule there – Cnut had ruled a North Sea empire comprising Denmark, Norway, England and parts of Sweden – while Cnut's son with Ælfgifu, Harold Harefoot, was on the ground in England and stoking his claim to the throne. In some desperation, Emma remembered her other boys, living across the Channel, who also had claim to the throne. In 1036, Edward sailed back to England for the first time since he was a boy on a crown-fishing expedition. When he was met by an army rather than acclaim, Edward decided that his mother's assurances of welcome were as trustworthy as her maternal feelings and sailed back to Normandy. But later in the year, his younger brother Alfred decided to try his luck.

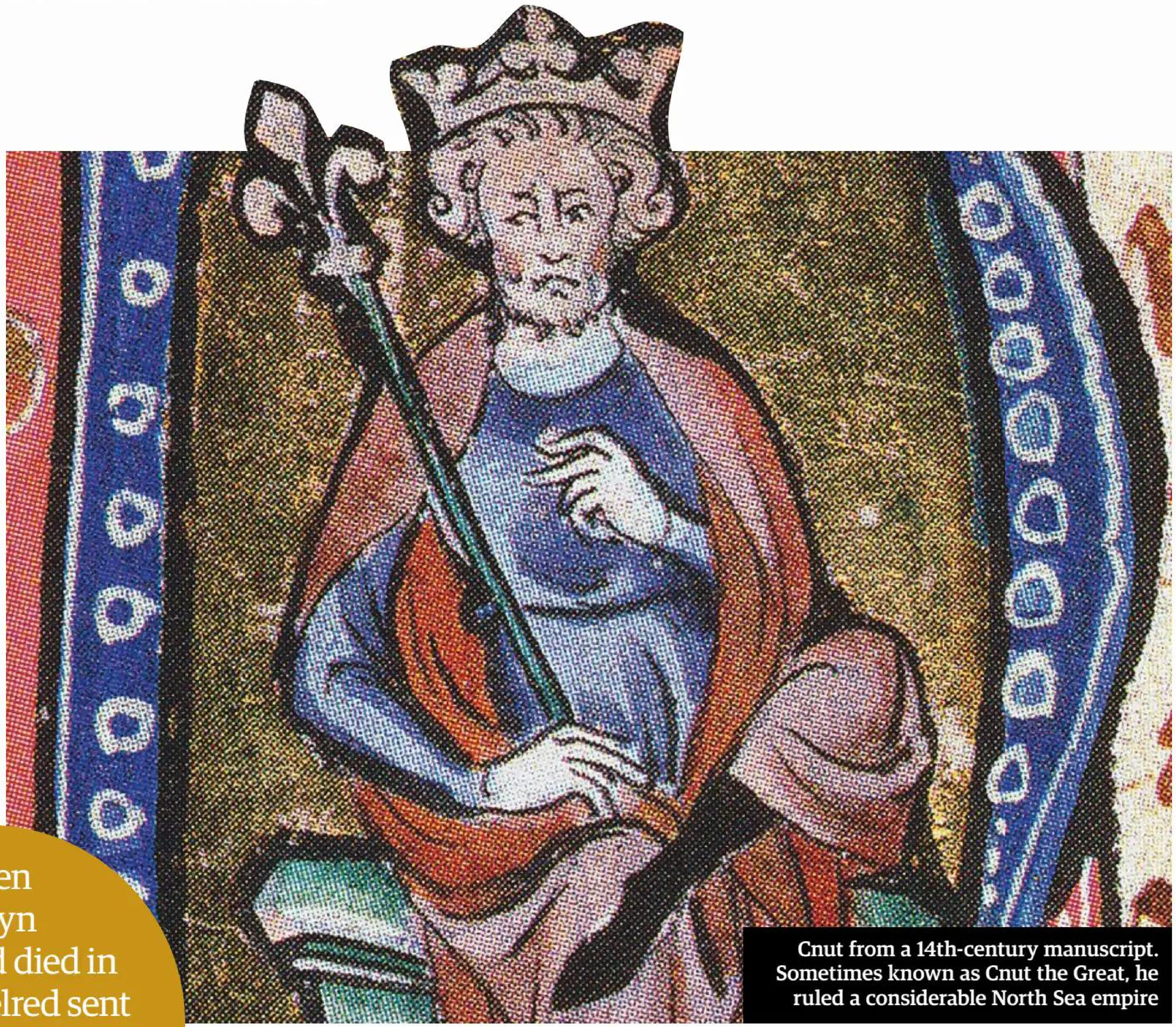
Alfred and his men were met by Earl Godwin, the most powerful Englishman in the land. The Godwin family had risen to prominence from obscure origins under Cnut. Godwin welcomed Alfred and his men and took them to Guildford, feasting and entertaining them.

Then, as they slept off the feast, they were attacked. Alfred's men were variously killed, enslaved, mutilated and scalped. Alfred himself was taken prisoner but, in captivity, his eyes were put out: a blind man could not claim the throne. The young prince soon succumbed to his wounds. Earl Godwin had been, with Emma, a supporter of Harthacnut, but with this wet work Godwin successfully ingratiated himself with Harold Harefoot. In Harthacnut's continuing absence, Harold Harefoot was crowned king – and Emma was sent into exile. Not to Normandy – where Edward might have given her a frosty reception – but to Flanders.

However, Emma was not yet finished with being queen. She commissioned her defence, a work exonerating her of all blame, and renewed her contacts with Harthacnut. In England, Harold Harefoot fell ill and died on 17 March 1040. Emma sailed back to England with her son, Harthacnut, a queen once more.

But then, in 1041, something really extraordinary happened: Harthacnut invited his half brother, Edward, over from Normandy to rule alongside him. Kings not being known for voluntarily sharing power, it may be that Harthacnut needed Edward

> When Sweyn Forkbeard died in 1014, Æthelred sent his ten-year-old son Edward to England to help negotiate his return



Cnut from a 14th-century manuscript. Sometimes known as Cnut the Great, he ruled a considerable North Sea empire

Defining moment

Born into interesting times

c.1004

Edward, the first child of King Æthelred the Unready's second wife, is born somewhere around 1004. It could have been 1003 or 1005. The uncertainty shows how little attention was paid to him when he was young: as a prince with a distant claim to the throne, it was not worth recording his birth in annals such as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Edward is born in the midst of repeated Viking attacks that are grinding down the ability of the English to resist.

Timeline

1013

Into exile
Sweyn Forkbeard invades England. Emma, the queen, flees to relatives in Normandy, taking both her sons, Edward and Alfred, with her.

1014

The return of the king (unfortunately)
Æthelred returns to reclaim the throne and promptly cripples the fight against Sweyn's son, Cnut.

23 April 1016

Death of another king
Æthelred finally dies. His son, Edmund Ironside, leads the struggle against the Danes.

30 November 1016

Death of a third king
Edmund Ironside dies. Sweyn's son, Cnut, is now the unopposed king. Edward returns to exile.

July 1017

A queen again
Edward's mother, Emma, leaving her children in Normandy, returns to England to marry Cnut and reign as his queen.

1016-35

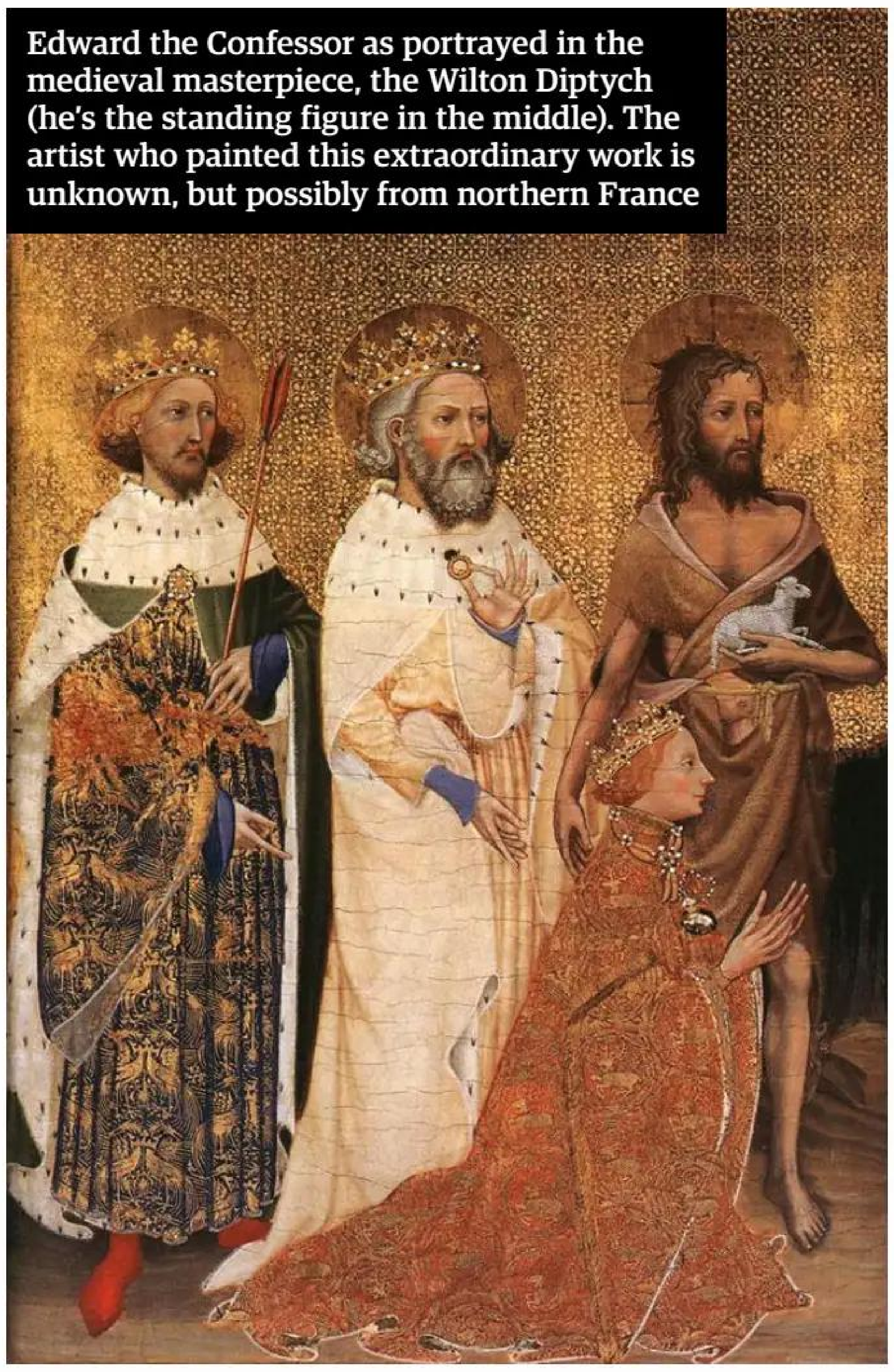
The forgotten exile
With Cnut secure on the throne, Edward lives in exile with his relatives in Normandy.

12 November 1035

The tide sweeps Cnut away
Cnut dies. Emma backs her son, Harthacnut, for the throne of England but he is delayed in Denmark.

1036

Edward tries his luck
Edward lands in England with a small army but is forced to withdraw.



Edward the Confessor as portrayed in the medieval masterpiece, the Wilton Diptych (he's the standing figure in the middle). The artist who painted this extraordinary work is unknown, but possibly from northern France

to help shore up his increasingly unpopular reign. But a simpler explanation may be that Harthacnut was ailing and feared he had little time left to live. No doubt Emma, keen to install another son on the throne, suggested Edward as both stop gap and potential successor.

Whatever the solution to this riddle, on 8 June 1042, Harthacnut died at a wedding feast. Edward, by this time in his late 30s, was, most unexpectedly, the new king of England.

Though king, Edward's position was unusually weak: he had no power base in the country and, in a time when power depended as much on personal relationships and ties as armed force, he was a stranger in a strange land. As such, he had no choice but to depend on his earls, of whom the most powerful was Godwin – the man he held responsible for the death of his younger brother. Besides, he could use Godwin's help to deal with a long-standing problem of his own: his mother.

In November 1043, with Earl Godwin by his side, Edward rode to his mother's base in Winchester and stripped her of her treasures. Although Emma did earn partial rehabilitation, her scheming came to an end and this most remarkable of women died on 7 March 1052, being buried beside Cnut and Harthacnut in Winchester.

Such favours required payback and Godwin's terms were steep: on 23 January 1045, his daughter, Edith, married Edward. Thus, this earl of obscure background and humble origins might look towards his grandson becoming king of England. It was a heady prospect.

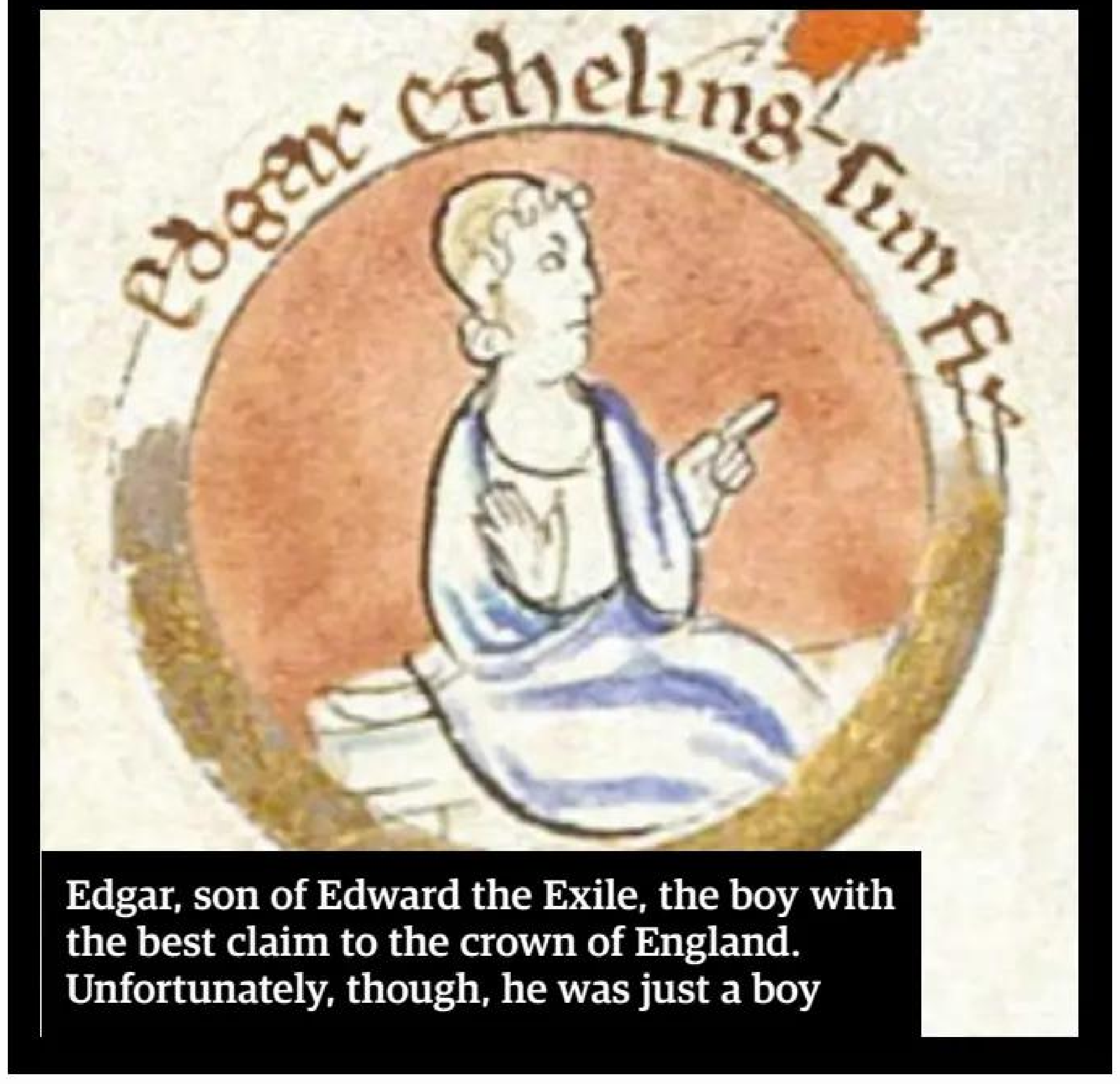
Godwin's sons prospered alongside their sister, with his eldest sons, Sweyn and Harold, raised to earldoms. The family now ruled most of southern England – an uncomfortable, perhaps unconscionable, situation for the king. For, in 1051, Edward moved against the Godwin family.

The cause of the dispute was a struggle over the appointment of the archbishop of Canterbury, but it became a struggle for mastery of the realm. Edward called in the support of the northern earls, while Godwin and his sons raised their own armies. But, as the rival armies converged on London, Godwin's men, reluctant to fight the king, slipped away, leaving the earl in an untenable position. When he sought to negotiate with Edward, the king sent back the reply that Godwin could have peace, "when he gave him back his brother alive."

The Godwins fled in exile. As for the queen, Edward put her into a convent. As 1051 drew to a close, Edward could think himself now truly master of the land he ruled. But, in exile, the Godwins were planning their return.

Did Edward really promise William the crown?

According to our Norman sources, Edward did. Early in 1051, as part of his campaign to rid himself of the Godwins, the sources say that Edward sent a message to William offering him the crown if he would support Edward in his struggle. William was Edward's first cousin, once removed (Edward's mother and William's grandfather were siblings), so there was a blood relationship, however distant, and Edward had reason to be grateful to the Norman dukes for giving him a home during his long exile. William, not surprisingly, accepted the offer. But Edward seems to have been all too free with his promises of the crown. In 1057, he recalled the son of Edmund Ironside, also called Edward, to England from his long exile in Hungary. As a direct descendant of the line of kings, Edward the Exile had the strongest claim of anyone to the throne. But, two days after his return, Edward the Exile died. Murdered? We don't know. But his death was certainly convenient for those who were gathering about the throne and its childless king. However, Edward the Exile had a son, Edgar, who inherited his claim. But Edgar was only five or six at the time. Would King Edward live long enough for Edgar's claim to come to the forefront?



Edgar, son of Edward the Exile, the boy with the best claim to the crown of England. Unfortunately, though, he was just a boy

Defining moment

King after all c.1041

Harthacnut, against all precedent, invites Edward to return from exile and rule alongside him in England as co-regent. He does this either to shore up his own unpopular rule or because he knows he is ill and, being without any children, he is putting a successor in place should he succumb to his illness. Whichever it is, Edward, by now in his late 30s, finds himself, against all expectations, a king.

Defining moment

Taking down the Godwins c.1051

It started with a dispute over who would be Archbishop of Canterbury. Earl Godwin wanted his man, but Edward insisted on making his Norman cleric archbishop. It escalated into a full-on armed confrontation: the king and the northern earls against the Godwins – and the Godwins backed down. With support crumbling, Earl Godwin and his sons fled into exile, while Edward promptly put his queen, Godwin's daughter, into a nunnery. The kingdom was the king's, finally. Or was it...?

1036

Alfred III's luck
Edward's brother tries for the crown, but is captured by Earl Godwin and has his eyes put out. Alfred dies from his wounds.

1037

A new king
Harold Harefoot, another son of Cnut, is crowned king of England.

17 March 1040

Another king bites the dust
Harold Harefoot dies. He is only 24.

17 June 1040

And a new king arrives
Harthacnut lands in England and is crowned king.

8 June 1042

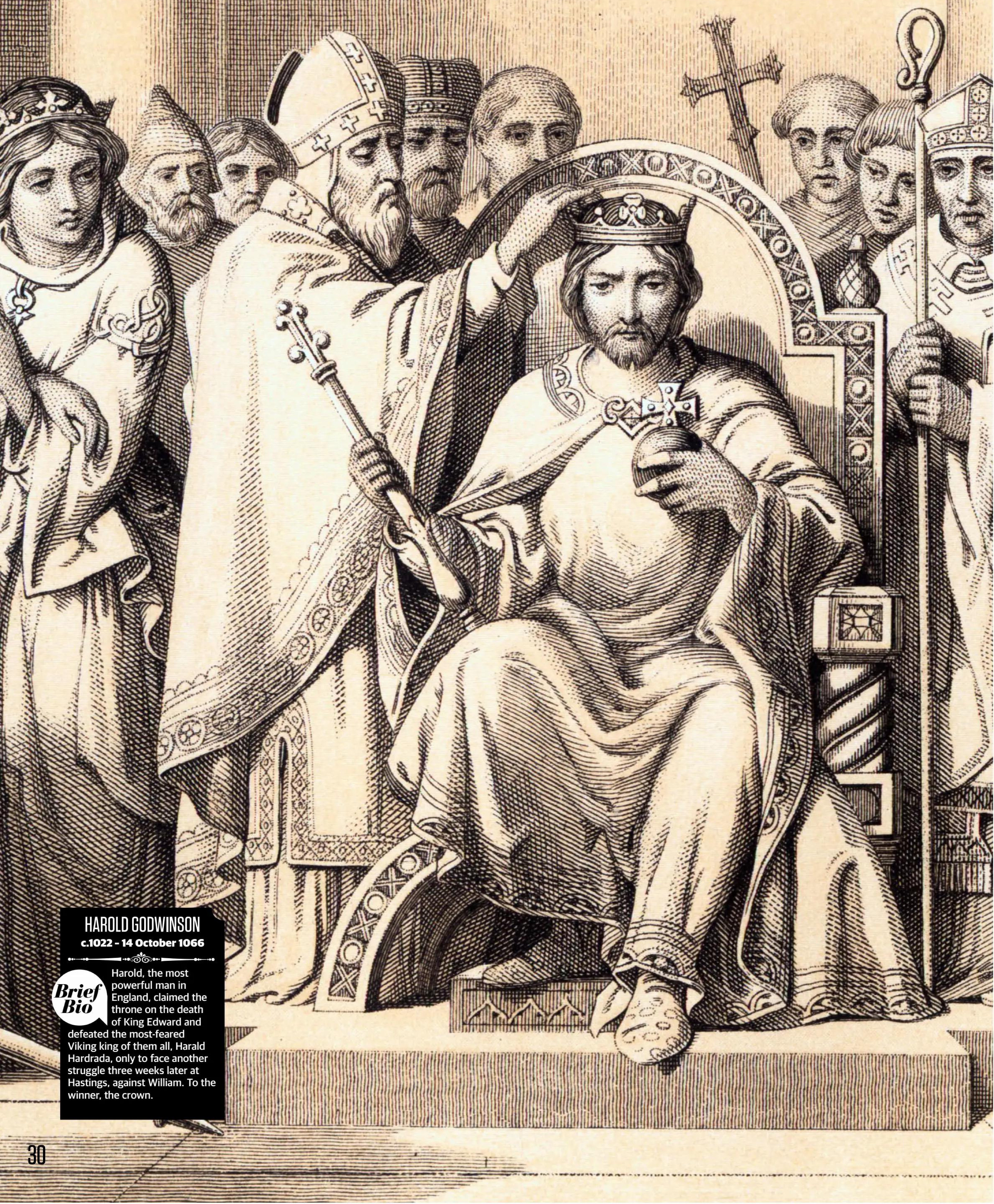
The king is dead, long live the king
Harthacnut dies. Against all expectation, Edward finds himself king of England.

November 1043

Mother troubles
Edward dispossesses his mother, Emma, of her treasures and banishes her from his court.

23 January 1045

A married man
Edward marries Edith, the daughter of Earl Godwin.



HAROLD GODWINSON

c.1022 – 14 October 1066

Brief Bio

Harold, the most powerful man in England, claimed the throne on the death of King Edward and defeated the most-feared Viking king of them all, Harald Hardrada, only to face another struggle three weeks later at Hastings, against William. To the winner, the crown.

The last Anglo-Saxon king

Harold, England's most powerful earl, claimed the throne on King Edward's death. But to hold on to the crown, Harold knew he would have to fight

The Godwin family had learned one thing through their years of service to the crown: while men might pay lip service to the rules of succession, in truth the crown went to who could claim and hold it. This knowledge was deep and bitter. Harold's grandfather, Wulfnoth, had been a victim of the plots and rumours that swirled around King Æthelred, but his father, Godwin, had risen to power through loyal service to King Cnut, becoming the most powerful man in the land after the king.

Then, when Cnut died, Godwin had been kingmaker, helping to raise first Harold Harefoot, then Harthacnut, to the throne. When Harthacnut had died, Godwin had eased the accession to the throne of Edward, the unlikely king, thus clearing – at least in the conscience of the earl – the bloodguilt he owed Edward for his part in the death of Edward's brother, Alfred. What's more, Earl Godwin had sealed his place as the power behind the throne by marrying his daughter to Edward. Now Earl Godwin could look towards the prospect of his grandson taking the throne of England

Harold's mistress, Edith Swan-neck, may have been Eadgifu the Fair, one of the largest landholders in England before 1066

But the king had not forgotten what had happened to his brother. And, in 1051, he moved against his over-mighty earl and his family. Edward installed one of his Norman clerics, Robert de Jumièges, as the new Archbishop of Canterbury, against the opposition of Earl Godwin. It is likely that Edward gave Robert the task of conveying to the duke of Normandy his offer of the throne when, in the spring of 1051, the priest left England for Rome to receive his pallium from the pope, the vestment signifying his status as an archbishop.

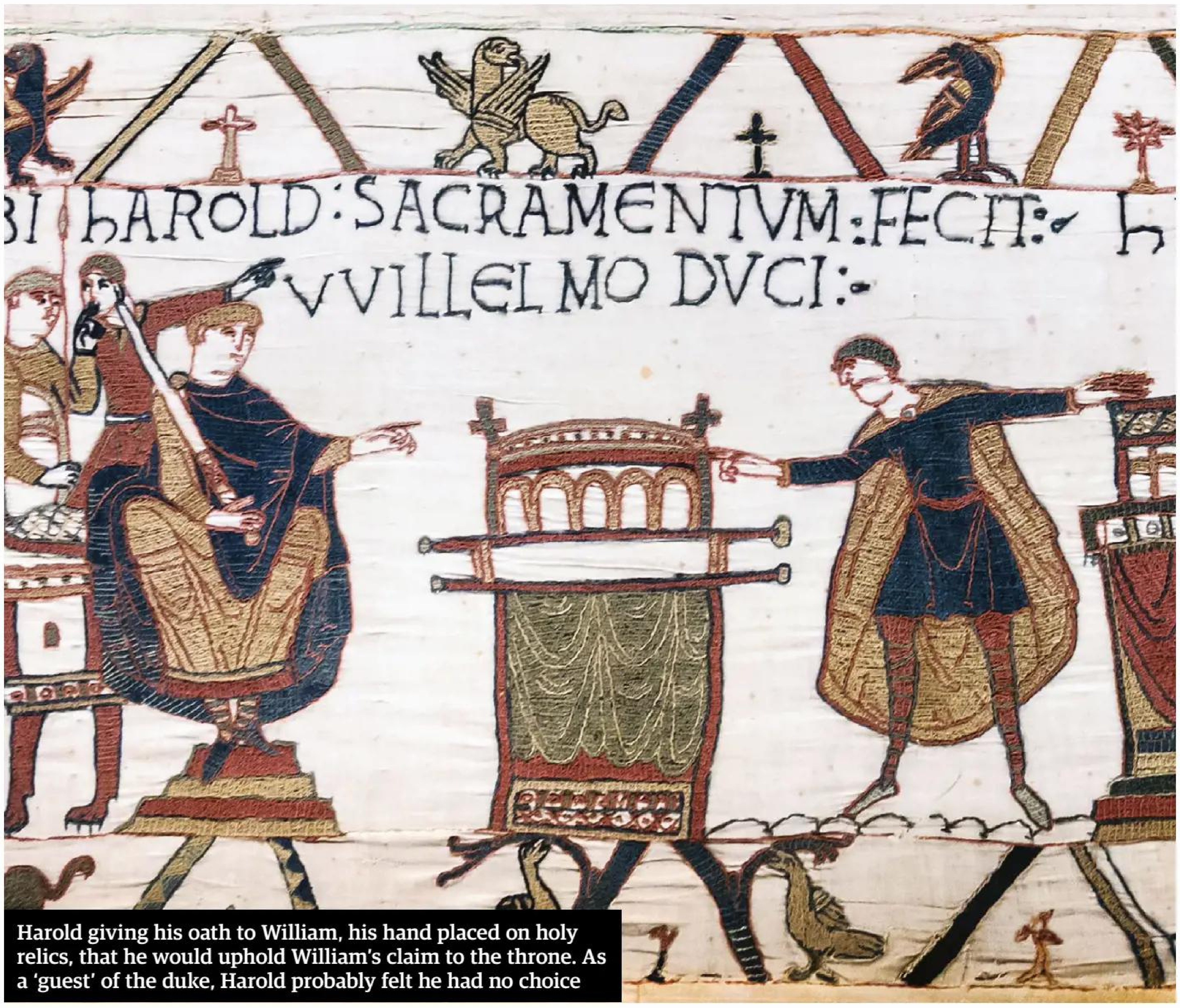
At the end of August, the simmering tension between king and earl broke when Godwin refused to carry out the harrying of the town of Dover that Edward demanded of him following an armed incident between the people of Dover and the retainers of Edward's brother-in-law. Dover was part of Godwin's earldom and he refused to injure the people. Earl confronted king. Godwin and his sons – Sweyn, Harold, Tostig, Gyrth, Leofwine and Wulfnoth – raised armies.

But the king had prepared for this confrontation. Calling the northern earls to his side, Edward raised his own forces and England trembled on the edge of civil strife.

But, seeing such a spectre rise before them, both sides paused. Earl Godwin agreed to come to London to stand before the king and answer the charge of treason. With both armies on opposite banks of the Thames at London, the Godwins

The scandalous life and death of Harold's elder brother

Sweyn Godwinson, the eldest son of Earl Godwin and Harold's elder brother, led a tumultuous life. According to the man himself, he was the son, not of Earl Godwin but of King Cnut. However, his mother denied the claim vehemently. In 1046, Sweyn abducted Eadgifu, the abbess of Leominster, intending to marry her and claim the Leominster estates. When the king refused to agree to the marriage, Sweyn released Eadgifu, who returned to Leominster. But her abbey was disbanded, which suggests Eadgifu may not have been an entirely unwilling abductee. Sweyn fled to Flanders. In 1049, Sweyn returned, hoping to reclaim his territories, which had been split between Harold and a cousin, Beorn. Beorn eventually agreed to help Sweyn, but Sweyn ended up abducting Beorn too. The end for his cousin was worse than for the abbess: Sweyn murdered him. As a result, Sweyn was outlawed again. However, Earl Godwin engineered his forgiveness, but when the Godwins were exiled in 1051, Sweyn left the rest of the family to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem and atone for his sins – these being so heinous that he went barefoot. But Sweyn, purged of his sin, died on the way back before he could sin again.



Harold giving his oath to William, his hand placed on holy relics, that he would uphold William's claim to the throne. As a 'guest' of the duke, Harold probably felt he had no choice

realised that the balance of power had shifted decisively against them, for much of their own forces had slipped away, unwilling to fight the king.

Edward, seeing this, delivered his terms to Earl Godwin: that he might have peace when he returned the king's brother to him, alive. There would be no terms.

Earl Godwin fled, with his wife and sons Sweyn and Tostig, to Flanders. Harold and Leofwine went into exile in Ireland. The last remaining Godwin in England was the queen, and with her family fled, Edward put Edith into a nunnery.

The king had his country.

But Edward couldn't keep it. To guard against the Godwins' return, Edward had relied upon the levy of ships he could raise as king. Initially, it seemed to work. However, in 1052, when the Godwins raised their own fleet, the king's boats dispersed, having fulfilled their time of service, leaving the coast unguarded. Earl Godwin's fleet met with a separate armada raised by Harold and Leofwine in Ireland, and sailed unopposed up the Channel, round Kent and up the Thames. By 14 September, they had reached London, anchoring at Southwark. Edward had managed to scrabble together 50 boats to meet them, and again the two sides faced off against each other. The Godwins demanded the king return their land and earldoms. This time, however, support leached away from the king. The rising tide allowed the Godwin's ships to surround Edward's boats, anchored on the north side of the Thames.

The king had lost his country. Robert de Jumièges and Edward's other Norman advisers fled. In a display of political theatre, Earl Godwin met the king, begged his forgiveness and proclaimed his innocence of all charges against him. Edward, humiliated and outmanoeuvred, had no choice but to return to the Godwins all their lands and titles. Not long afterwards, Edward brought his wife and queen out of the convent he had confined her in.

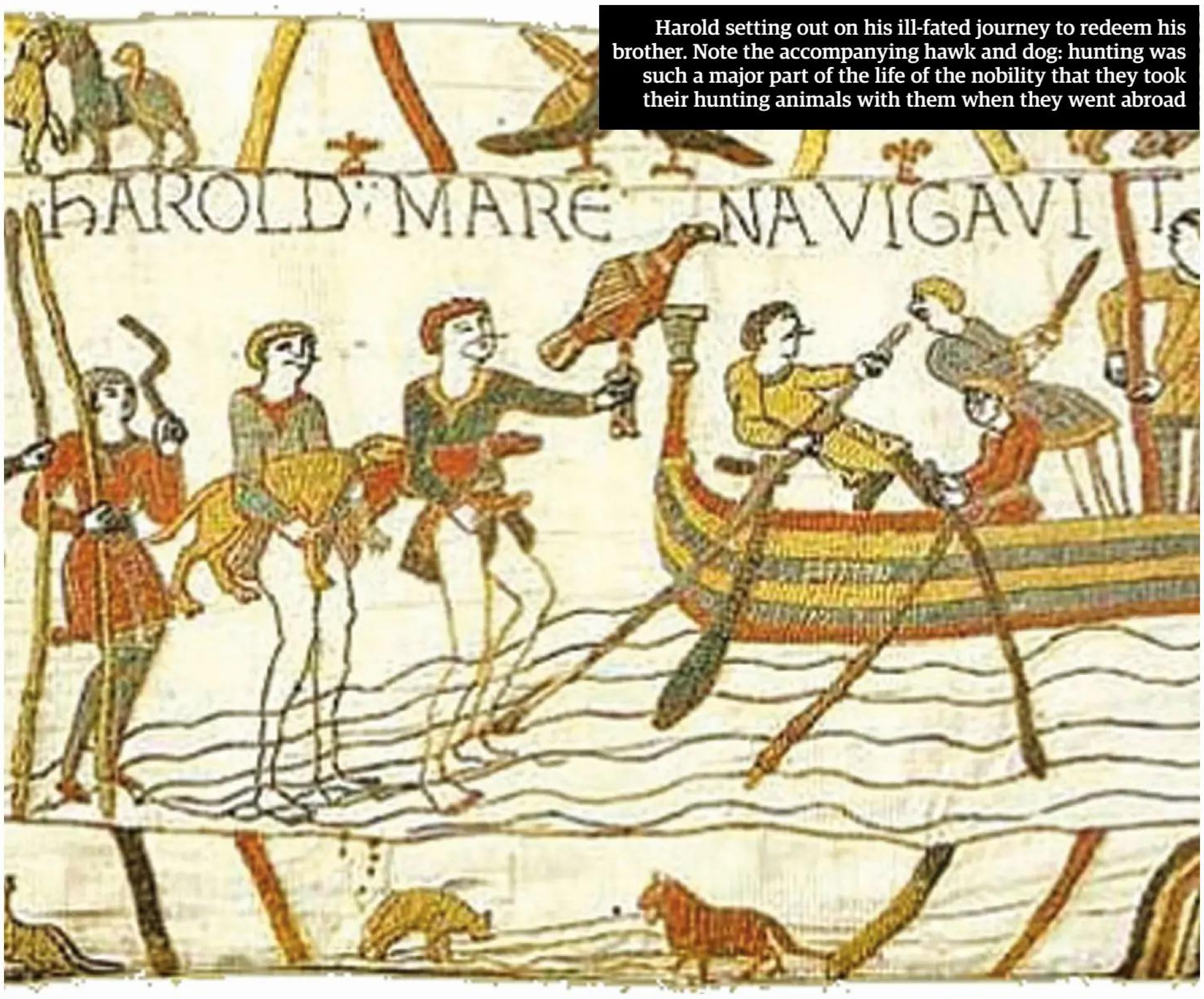
To everyone in England it must have been clear that while Edward wore the crown, the Godwins had the power. But in 1052, the Godwins suffered a reverse with no return: Earl Godwin's eldest son, Sweyn, died.

The estates of the Godwinsons produced an income of £8,500 a year in the 1050s; the king's estates returned £6,000

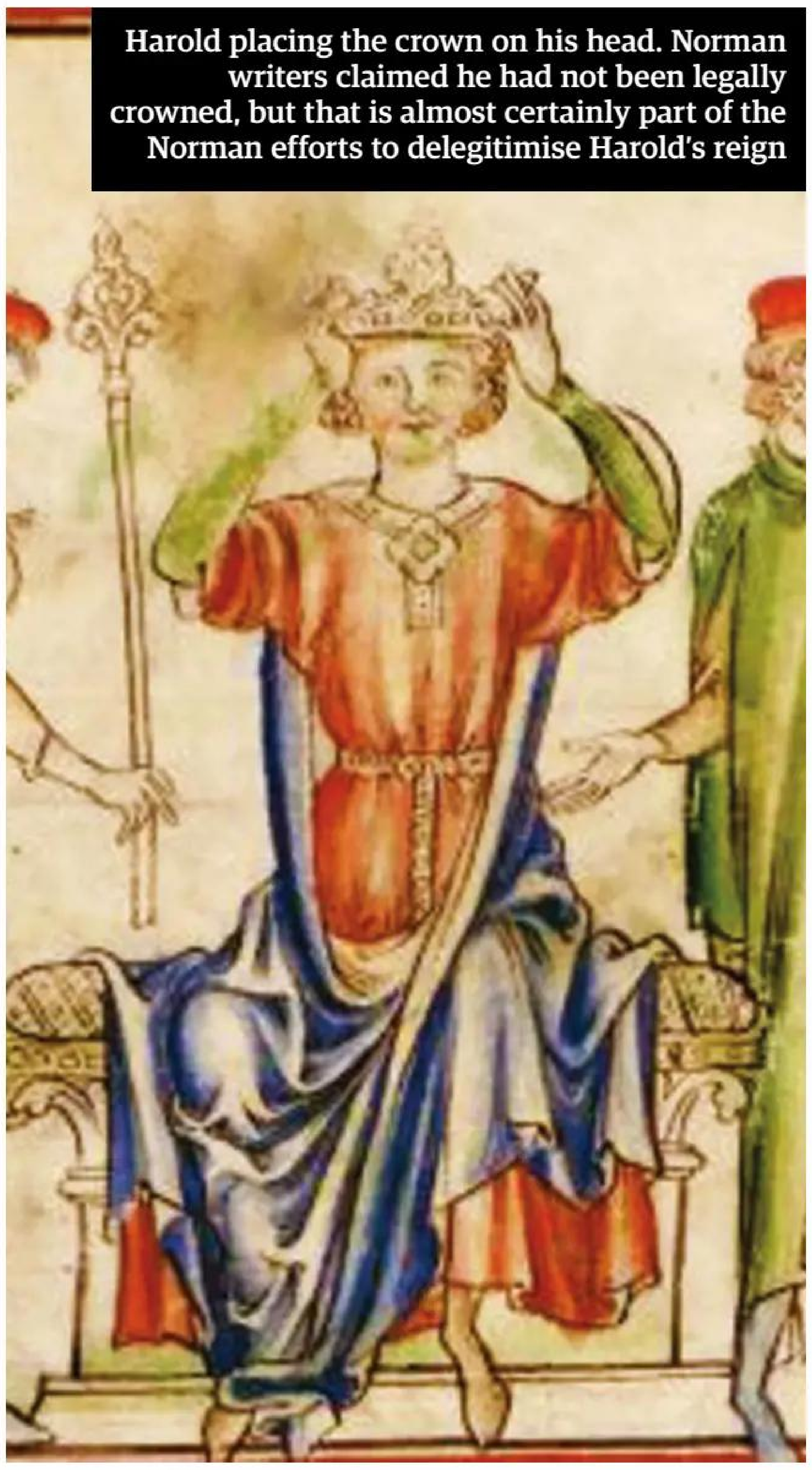
A deeper blow hit the family on 15 April 1053: their patriarch, Earl Godwin, died. According to one chronicler, just before his collapse at the Easter Monday feast, the earl had asked that God not let him swallow if he had done anything to injure either the king or his late brother. From the descriptions of other sources, it seems the earl suffered a stroke. But with the father dead, his eldest surviving son, Harold, succeeded to the earldom of Wessex. As the senior Godwin, Harold moved to promote the interests of his brothers and, in 1055, he engineered the promotion of Tostig to the earldom of Northumbria, while by 1057 he had installed Gyrth as earl of East Anglia and Leofwine as earl of the counties surrounding London. Apart from Mercia, the Godwins were lords of England. And the king, apparently acquiescing, largely withdrew from affairs, contenting himself with attending mass each day, hunting and the building of a new minster, west of London, the Westminster Abbey.

Then, in 1064, the records tell us Harold crossed the Channel and became the guest of Duke William in Normandy.

Why should Harold, now indisputably the most powerful man in the land, let himself fall into the clutches of William? The Norman sources claim that Edward sent Harold to William with the promise that the crown would come to him after Edward's death. But even if the king still wanted this to happen, why should Harold carry such a wish? Edward was in his 60s and he had handed over the running of the kingdom to Harold – he couldn't have made Harold carry such a promise to William even if he'd wanted him to. English chronicles claim it was all a mistake: a fishing trip blown off course by a storm. But there was reason for Harold to visit William: the Duke had one of his brothers. In the crisis of 1051, Godwin had handed over his youngest son, Wulfnoth, to Edward as a hostage. Some time between then and the Godwins' return in 1052, Wulfnoth had been taken across the Channel to Normandy, and left in the keeping of William. And there he had remained ever since. The most plausible explanation is that Harold set sail with the aim of buying the freedom of his youngest brother.



Harold setting out on his ill-fated journey to redeem his brother. Note the accompanying hawk and dog: hunting was such a major part of the life of the nobility that they took their hunting animals with them when they went abroad



Harold placing the crown on his head. Norman writers claimed he had not been legally crowned, but that is almost certainly part of the Norman efforts to delegitimise Harold's reign

If that was his aim, it failed. Harold returned home without him. But William, for his part, had gained something from Harold: the promise to help William to the throne. For Harold, prisoner first to the Count of Ponthieu and then William's 'guest', there must have seemed little choice but to give his word to gain his freedom. But William seems to have been of a literal turn of mind: an oath, however extracted, was still an oath.

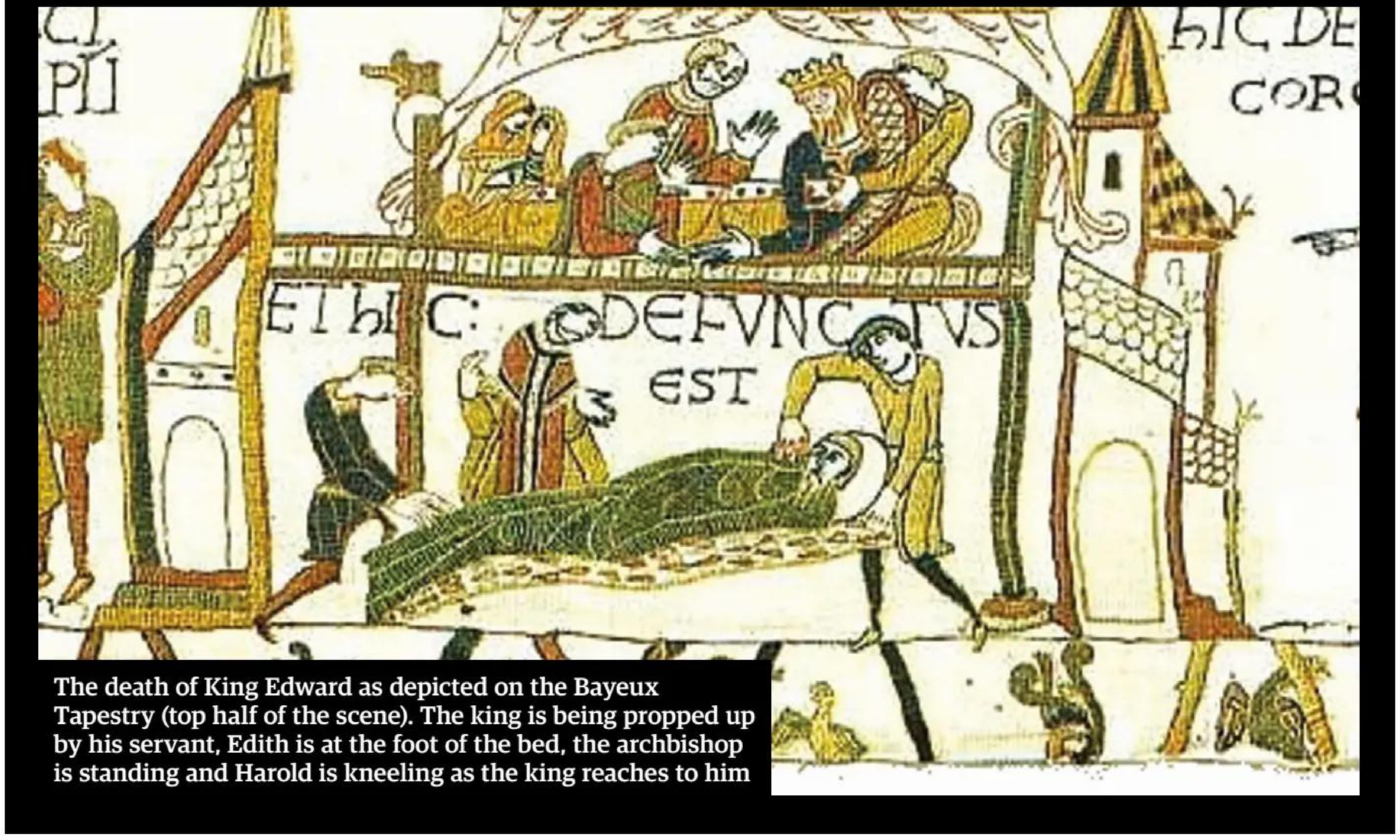
Harold returned home in 1065 to find his brother, Tostig's, earldom under threat. Rebels had united behind the son of the previous earl, intending to depose Tostig and install Morcar as earl of Northumbria. Unhappy with Tostig's governance, the rebels had assembled a great army. Harold went to negotiate with them himself. But the rebels would not accept Tostig back. Returning to the king and his brother, Harold reported their demands, only for Tostig to accuse him of treachery. That seems unlikely: the Godwins' greatest strength had always been their support for each other. But, in this case, Harold was not willing to fight for his brother's cause and on 27 October 1065, Harold told the rebels that they could have their demands: the installation of Morcar as earl of Northumbria and the restitution of their old laws. Four days later, the furious Tostig, with his family and retainers, went into exile. The unity of the Godwin family had been broken, with what would be fatal consequences for them all.

For, at the end of the year, the king fell ill. On 6 January 1066, Edward died.

Harold was crowned the same day.

The deathbed of King Edward

Did King Edward give the crown to Harold Godwinson, his most powerful earl, as he lay dying on 6 January 1066? The sources disagree, although most do concur that Edward did give rule of the kingdom into Harold's hands. However, the *Life of Edward*, commissioned by his queen, tells us who was with him on that fateful day: Edith herself, her brother Harold, the archbishop of Canterbury and the steward of the palace. The Bayeux Tapestry reproduces this scene. But what exactly did Edward say? Again, according to the *Vita (Life) of Edward*, the king commended the queen and the kingdom to Harold's protection. Not exactly a ringing endorsement of Harold's kingship – although admittedly the king was dying at the time. But, in England, the king's wish did not determine his successor; in the end, that was a matter for the magnates of the country. And Harold had spent many years cultivating his contacts with them carefully. So it was no surprise that they chose Harold as king, and saw him crowned the same day as Edward died.



The death of King Edward as depicted on the Bayeux Tapestry (top half of the scene). The king is being propped up by his servant, Edith is at the foot of the bed, the archbishop is standing and Harold is kneeling as the king reaches to him

The last Viking king

With the Viking Age setting in the west, one man set out to reclaim the lands, power and culture of his forefathers. His name was Harald Hardrada, and this is his story

Conqueror, exile, mercenary and warlord; Harald Hardrada was many things during his bloody, brutal and eventful life. However, he was one thing above all others: a Viking. Descended, according to Scandinavian saga, from the legendary first-ever king of Norway, Harald Fairhair, Hardrada – named due to his style for 'hard rule' – came from a long line of war-loving Viking rulers who each, much to the terror of large swathes of Europe, had ravaged, pillaged and ransacked with a frequency that was previously unimaginable. The culture, landscape and language of Europe had irrevocably been altered by the Age of the Vikings, and Hardrada, born into one of its noble institutions, was brought up to be totally wrapped in its ideals and indoctrinated into a mindset the likes of which had seen the nations of Scandinavia dominate the known world for almost 300 years.

It was this in-built, centuries-old lust for war and conquest that saw Hardrada engage in his first ever battle in 1030 CE, a mere 15 years after his birth in Ringerike, Norway. Hardrada's brother Olaf Haraldsson had been forced into exile in 1028 CE after the Danish King Cnut the Great had taken the Norwegian throne for himself. However, upon Olaf's return in 1030 CE, Hardrada drummed up the support of 600 men from the Norwegian Uplands and joined with Olaf to take down Cnut. As such, on 29 July 1030 CE Hardrada took the fight to the Danish at the Battle of Stiklestad, fighting with his brother for control of his ancestors' country. Unfortunately, despite showing considerable military might on the battlefield, Hardrada was defeated by the far larger

> Harald's nickname was well given: it means 'hard rule' or 'stern ruler', which sums up his reign perfectly

HARALD HARDRADA

Norwegian, 1015 CE-1066 CE

Brief Bio Born Harald Sigurdsson, Harald Hardrada was king of Norway from 1045 until his death at the Battle of Stamford Bridge in 1066. Son of Sigurd Syr, a chieftain from Norway's eastern territories, Hardrada garnered the nickname 'Harald the Ruthless' due to a series of brutal raids on his neighbouring territories.

War of words

Battleaxe

The axe was the primary weapon for all the Scandinavian cultures of the Viking Age, with a multitude of designs used between nations with differing shafts and heads. One of the most popular designs was the Daneaxe, a large two-handed weapon with long shaft and crescent-shaped wrought iron head. Often the axe head would be granted a steel cutting edge, a factor that helped it generate skull-splitting force.

Sword

If a Viking carried a sword then it would be his primary weapon. The problem was that swords were more expensive to produce than axes, and so were only carried by the rich and powerful. Viking swords were 90 centimetres in length and took a Roman spatha-like design, with a tight grip, long fuller and no pronounced cross-guard. Hilts and handles were often inlaid with jewels or unique inscriptions.

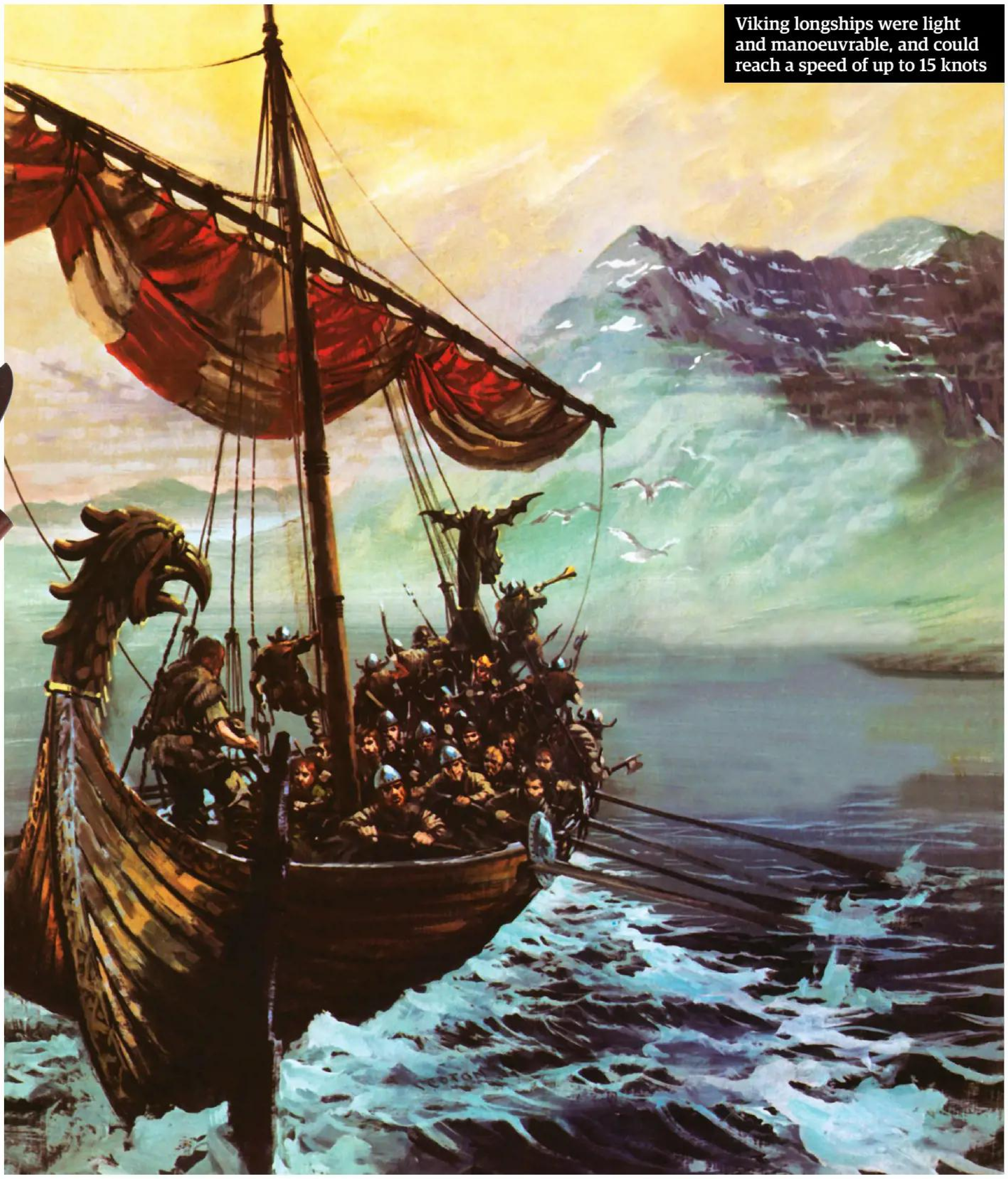
Dagger

The standard secondary weapon for each Viking warrior, the dagger was an incredibly versatile weapon, granting an element of speed to the Viking's otherwise slow armament. In particular, the seax was a popular model that consisted of a symmetrical straight blade of various lengths with a smooth, wooden hilt. Seax daggers such as this could also be used for skinning animals and carving.

Danish army, with Olaf being killed in the fighting. Hardrada barely escaped with his life, having been badly wounded in the melee. In fact, were it not for the covert help of his friend Rögnvald Brusason – the future Earl of Orkney – Hardrada would never have reached the remote farmstead in eastern Norway that he did a few weeks after the battle, nor been able to recover from his serious wounds. A month went by, and with each passing day the reality of what had occurred became all the more apparent to Hardrada. He had let down his brother, father, nation and revered forefathers. He had been defeated at the first hurdle, part-crippled by a foreign invader that remained in control of his country. Unable to bear the guilt any longer, one month after his defeat Hardrada exiled himself to Sweden, journeying north over the mountains by the cover of darkness.

Over the following year little is known of Hardrada's movements or activities, with not even the sagas of old recalling what transpired. All that is known today is that almost a year to the day after his defeat at Stiklestad, Hardrada arrived in the town of Staraya Ladoga in the Kievan Rus region of north-eastern Europe. The Kievan people were a wild bunch of Slavic tribes renowned for their hardiness, combat prowess and expertise in trade, with their geographical position placing them very much at the gates between the largely Byzantine-controlled east and the Scandinavian-occupied west. So when Hardrada emerged from the wilderness in 1031 CE, his ancestry and prowess in combat saw him warmly welcomed by the Rus' ruler Grand Prince Yaroslav the Wise, whose wife Ingegerd was a distant relative of his.

Badly in need of military commanders and recognising Harald's ability in combat, Yaroslav immediately made Hardrada leader of his forces and dispatched him to the western border to fight the Polish peoples at war with the Rus. The faith Yaroslav placed in Harald's breeding was well founded, with the warrior completing a crushing



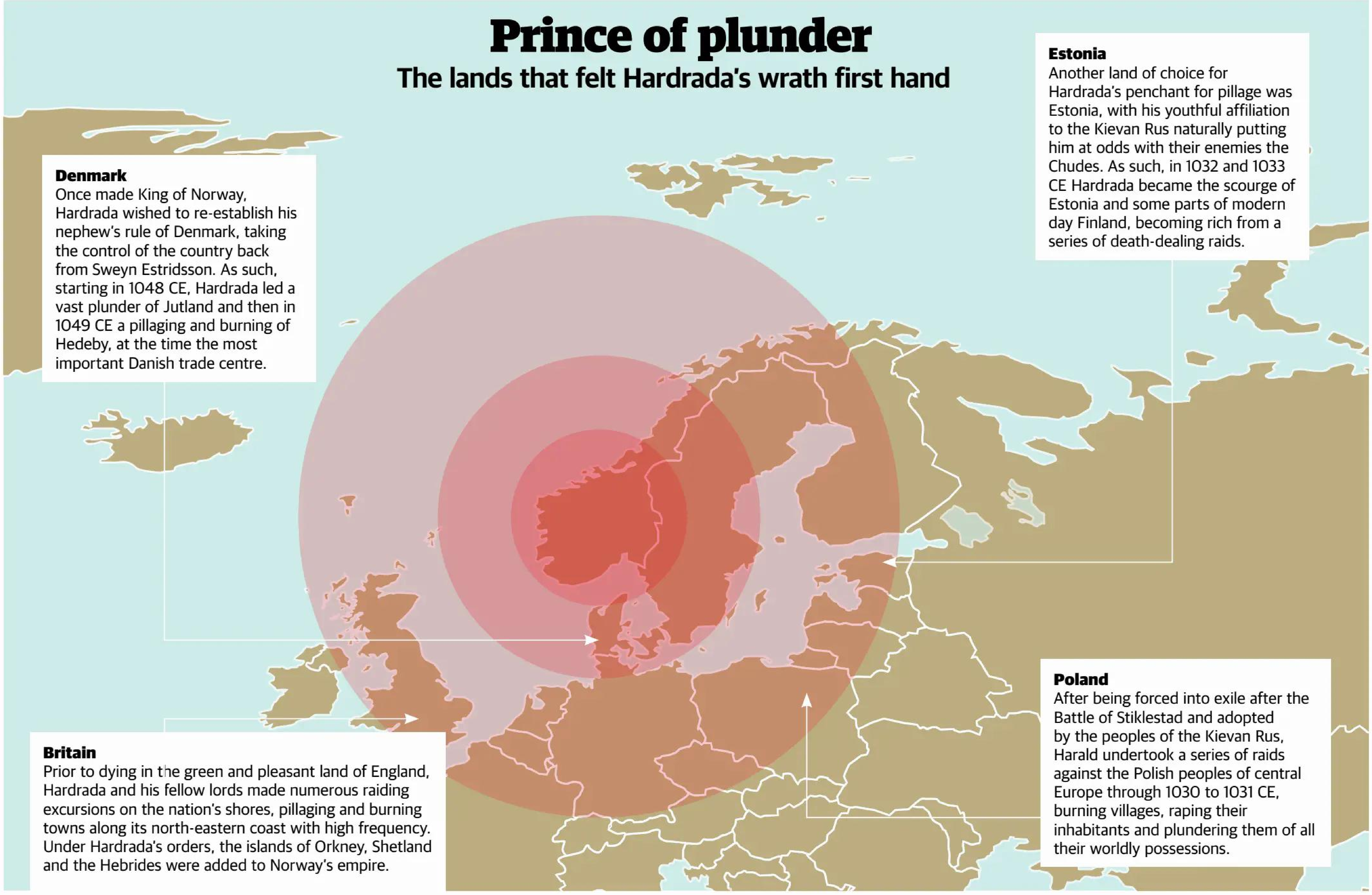
Viking longships were light and manoeuvrable, and could reach a speed of up to 15 knots

War of words

While it is true that Hardrada's reign was characterised by raiding, war and blood, he was also reportedly a sound diplomat and economist, and used his skills to bring a period of stability to Norway when much of Scandinavia was in turmoil. Two of the most notable examples of the king's ability to expand his empire by words rather than axe are, firstly, his arrangement of new international trade routes and deals – a decision that brought in much wealth to Norway, with deals struck with the Kievan Rus and the vast Byzantine Empire – and, secondly, his dissemination of Christianity throughout the lands of Norway. Indeed, Hardrada had been converted early to Christianity, and upon becoming king of Norway he implemented many policies geared towards promoting it – be that through direct communication or via the construction of churches and the reparation of existing ones.

Prince of plunder

The lands that felt Hardrada's wrath first hand



Estonia
Another land of choice for Hardrada's penchant for pillage was Estonia, with his youthful affiliation to the Kievan Rus naturally putting him at odds with their enemies the Chudes. As such, in 1032 and 1033 CE Hardrada became the scourge of Estonia and some parts of modern day Finland, becoming rich from a series of death-dealing raids.

Denmark
Once made King of Norway, Hardrada wished to re-establish his nephew's rule of Denmark, taking the control of the country back from Sweyn Estridsson. As such, starting in 1048 CE, Hardrada led a vast plunder of Jutland and then in 1049 CE a pillaging and burning of Hedeby, at the time the most important Danish trade centre.

Poland
After being forced into exile after the Battle of Stiklestad and adopted by the peoples of the Kievan Rus, Harald undertook a series of raids against the Polish peoples of central Europe through 1030 to 1031 CE, burning villages, raping their inhabitants and plundering them of all their worldly possessions.

Britain
Prior to dying in the green and pleasant land of England, Hardrada and his fellow lords made numerous raiding excursions on the nation's shores, pillaging and burning towns along its north-eastern coast with high frequency. Under Hardrada's orders, the islands of Orkney, Shetland and the Hebrides were added to Norway's empire.

campaign against Poland, slaughtering hundreds and thousands of Poles and driving them back into their country's distant heartlands. Following this victory, Yaroslav left Hardrada to engage the Chude peoples of Estonia and the Pechenegs nomads that had been fighting on and off with the Rus for decades, with similar and horrific results. Hardrada was reportedly demonic on the battlefield, driven by some seemingly unnatural force in pursuit of his enemy's blood, transcending into a berserker state that no man could oppose.

These victories for the Rus saw Hardrada gain a fearsome reputation, with a band of 500 men pledging their loyalty to him. Hardrada and his band of mercenary warriors were now the most feared fighting force in Europe and, after securing the Kievan territories in 1033 CE, they set off in a quest for fame and riches heading south to Constantinople, the capital city of the fabulously wealthy Byzantine Empire. Arriving there in 1034 CE and immediately introducing himself to the Byzantine Emperor Michael IV, Hardrada and his men were immediately employed in the Emperor's Varangian Guard, an elite fighting force controlled directly by the ruler. In theory, the Varangian Guard were supposed to simply protect the Emperor, but due to Hardrada's desire for battle he was soon fighting on almost every front of the empire.

From Arab pirates in the Mediterranean to rebel forces amassed in Sicily and onto Arab strongholds throughout Asia Minor, Hardrada became the scourge of any Byzantine enemy. He was deployed like a rampaging bull on the battlefield, one that could seemingly not be killed in combat no matter how far the odds were stacked in his opponents' favour. Returning back to Constantinople in 1041, Hardrada was now famed not just for his battle prowess, but also for his immense wealth, with almost seven years worth of plunder being amassed into a vast fortune that rivalled that of many kings. Indeed, Hardrada had raided so much that he had to send large portions of his loot back to Yaroslav for safekeeping – no boat was capable of carrying the sheer weight of the bountiful precious metals and jewels.

> Harald was among one of the Viking Age's most well-travelled warriors, spending time in Europe and Asia

Three ruthless victories

Asia Minor campaign 1035 CE

Following his joining of the Byzantine Varangian Guard, Hardrada was dispatched to Asia Minor to put down a widespread piratical Arab uprising. A series of running battles continued in which Harald pushed the Arab forces back into mainland Asia. Following this initial success, Hardrada led a search and destroy operation deep into the Asia Minor, slaughtering thousands and taking over 80 Arab strongholds.

Battle of Ostrovo 1041 CE

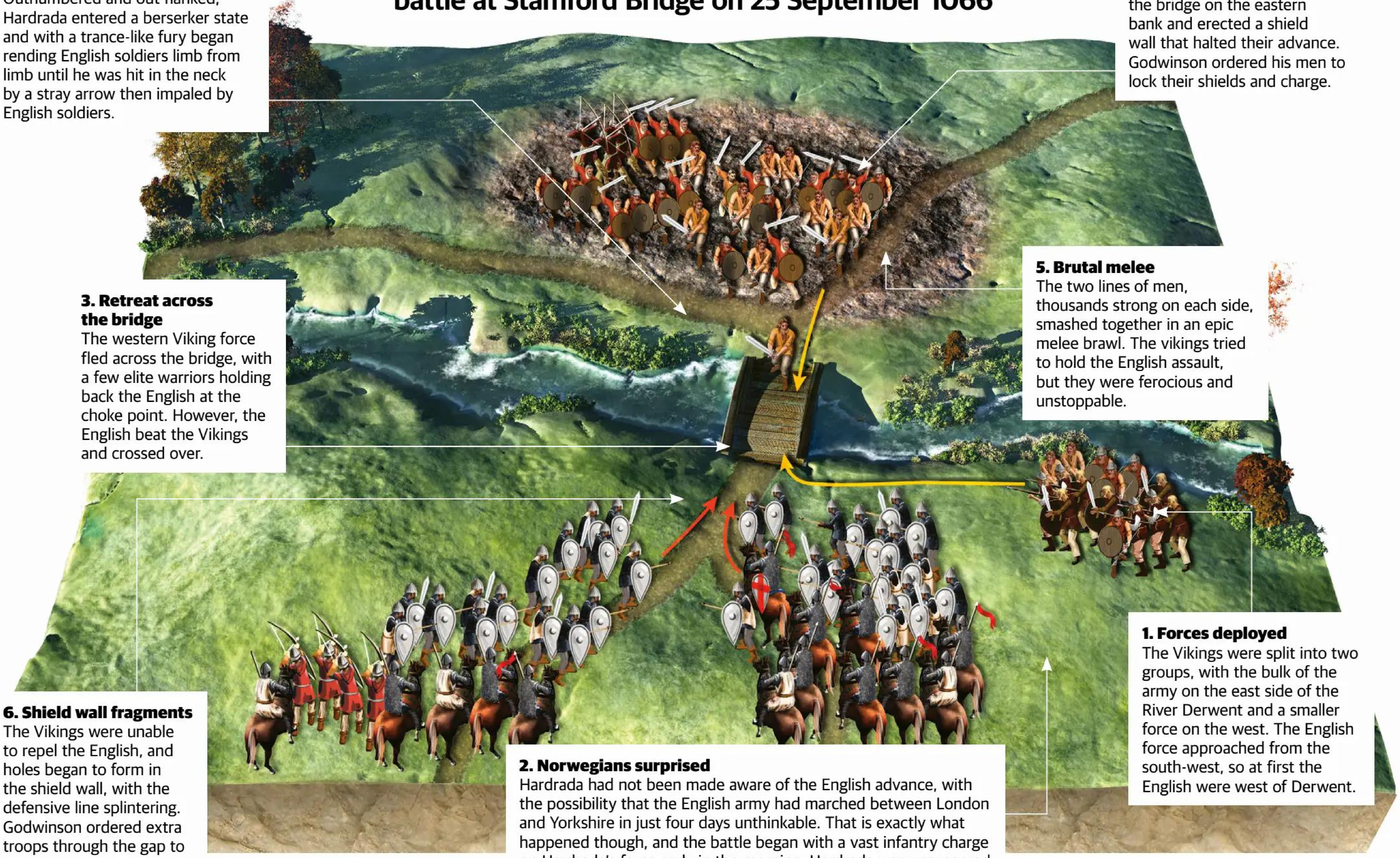
While the leader of the Varangian Guard, Hardrada led the Byzantine forces against a Bulgarian army in Greece. In 1040 Peter Delyan, a native Bulgarian, led an uprising against Byzantine rule and declared himself king. Hardrada killed his foe, crushed his forces in battle and re-suppressed Bulgaria to such an extent that it remained under Byzantine rule for another 145 years.

Battle of Fulford 1066 CE

Hardrada's last great victory, the Battle of Fulford saw him land in England and defeat northern Earls Edwin and Morcar of York in a battle involving over 15,000 soldiers. Harald's masterstroke was positioning his troops so he could absorb the heavy English infantry charge before countering down his right flank and breaking the enemy's lines. This won him the city of York.

Hardrada's last hurrah

Follow the events of the last Viking king's final battle at Stamford Bridge on 25 September 1066



1. Forces deployed
The Vikings were split into two groups, with the bulk of the army on the east side of the River Derwent and a smaller force on the west. The English force approached from the south-west, so at first the English were west of Derwent.

2. Norwegians surprised
Hardrada had not been made aware of the English advance, with the possibility that the English army had marched between London and Yorkshire in just four days unthinkable. That is exactly what happened though, and the battle began with a vast infantry charge on Hardrada's force early in the morning. Hardrada was unprepared and completely overrun.

3. Retreat across the bridge
The western Viking force fled across the bridge, with a few elite warriors holding back the English at the choke point. However, the English beat the Vikings and crossed over.

4. Shield wall formed
Hardrada mobilised his army, which descended towards the bridge on the eastern bank and erected a shield wall that halted their advance. Godwinson ordered his men to lock their shields and charge.

5. Brutal melee
The two lines of men, thousands strong on each side, smashed together in an epic melee brawl. The vikings tried to hold the English assault, but they were ferocious and unstoppable.

6. Shield wall fragments
The Vikings were unable to repel the English, and holes began to form in the shield wall, with the defensive line splintering. Godwinson ordered extra troops through the gap to outflank the enemy.

7. Hardrada falls
Outnumbered and out-flanked, Hardrada entered a berserker state and with a trance-like fury began rending English soldiers limb from limb until he was hit in the neck by a stray arrow then impaled by English soldiers.

Life after Harold

Despite a succession of other Norwegian and Scandinavian kings following Hardrada's death, none of them truly had Viking in the blood, and the Viking Age ended as abruptly as it began 300 years previously. Far from the war-loving, plundering and raiding mentality that won the Vikings almost all of northern Europe and 300 years of world history, these successors had neither the will nor the military might to maintain the Viking Age and their way of life, with Scandinavian influence subsiding, and gradually becoming subsumed into wider European culture over the following decades.

For example, Hardrada's successor was Magnus Haraldsson, who was left King regent upon Harold's departure for England. However, after only reigning for three peaceful and uneventful years, he died, possibly of ergotism, leaving his brother Olaf III to take the crown, who proceeded to rule Norway till his death in 1093. However, while his rule was long, it was not Viking, with the king renouncing any offensive foreign policies and diverting funds to the defence of Norwegian borders. This pattern of defensive and peaceful ruler continued, with the only combat experienced being that of the civil wars of the 12th and 13th centuries.

The domination of Viking culture had come crashing down with Hardrada's defeat at Stamford Bridge and Europe was now entering a new, more peaceful and civilised age. For Hardrada, in his last glorious stand, had being fighting on the razor's edge of a more savage time, one that saw the lands, language and laws of Europe changed forever. The last true Viking king was dead, and with him, so too the Viking Age.

While Hardrada's position under the Byzantine Emperor Michael IV was unassailable, in December of 1041 CE he quickly fell out of favour, becoming caught up in the middle of a war of succession. Realising that his position was never going to be same again, Hardrada escaped a now turbulent Constantinople just months later, returning by boat through the Black Sea to the Kievan Rus. Upon returning to a rapturous welcome from Yaroslav, Hardrada promptly married the latter's daughter Ellisif and, for a short time, settled down in the Kievan capital, engaging in little combat and remaining in the Rus for a further three years.

However, as the days and years dragged by, Hardrada was still tormented by his defeat at Sticklestad. He hadn't set foot in his native Norway for almost 15 years and, despite his vast riches and subsequent victories, was haunted by the legacy left to him by his ancestors. Norway, he decided, must be returned once more to Norwegian hands. Setting forth from Novgorod in early 1045 CE, Hardrada journeyed back to the country of his birth, arriving in Sweden once more later on in the year. Here, Hardrada received excellent news: Norway was already back in Norwegian hands, with the illegitimate son of Olaf, Magnus the Good, sitting securely on the throne. Apparently, Cnut the Great's sons had abandoned Hardrada's much-loved Norway, and were currently fighting for control of England.

> Hardrada's English victory was short-lived: in less than a week his troops were outflanked by Anglo-Saxon forces

Hardrada set off immediately to Norway and, after arriving in 1046 CE and negotiating with Magnus directly, struck a deal that he would jointly rule the country in exchange for half of his immense wealth. For the next two years, both Magnus and Harald ruled Norway, holding separate courts and rarely meeting. Hardrada now had everything he could want, owning much land, ruling his country and being fabulously wealthy too. However, after two years of supposedly living an ideal life, the Viking blood within Hardrada's veins called once more, leading him into a campaign of revenge against Denmark for the death of his brother and the pillaging of his ancestral lands. As such, in 1048 CE Hardrada plundered Jutland, pillaged and burned Hedeby – the most important Danish trade centre in the entire country – and launched a colossal naval assault on the Danish royal pretender Sweyn Estridsson. This battle was the infamous Battle of Nisa, and saw Hardrada lead 300 ships against Sweyn in a conflict that left many ships on both sides 'empty'.

Despite defeating Sweyn at Nisa and successfully launching multiple Viking raids on Denmark over the next six years, Hardrada never did take the Danish throne, and due to lack of finance was forced to begrudgingly declare peace with him in 1064 CE. Now recognising that he would never reclaim the Danish throne as his own, Hardrada shifted his attentions towards another rich and historic land: England. England had been controlled by Cnut the Great's son Harthacnut until 1042, when he died childless. As such, Edward the Confessor had crowned himself king in his absence and proceeded to rule the island nation for over 20 years. When Hardrada heard in early 1066 CE that Edward had died on 5 January, he immediately decided to launch one more glorious Viking conquest. Now 50, Hardrada must have knew that his time on Earth was coming to an end and, before he passed on to the afterlife to meet his hallowed ancestors, he needed to succumb once more to the call of his blood.

For the native English who witnessed the approach of 300 longships and 15,000 men on 8 September 1066 CE in north-east England, it must have felt like observing the coming of the apocalypse. The force was one of the greatest Viking armies ever to be assembled, and if unopposed would bring the nation to its knees. Stepping forth on English soil, Hardrada could taste the coming war, and after just 12 days he was not to be disappointed, with a 5,000-strong subsidiary English force crushed at the Battle of Fulford – see the 'Three ruthless victories' boxout for more information. Striding through the English dead, finally back in his element after years of inactivity and luxury, little did Hardrada know that this was to be his last victory. Just five days later, his army was surprised by the fierce force of the now English King Harold Godwinson, who marched over 180 miles in four days to meet with the Viking warlord at the Battle of Stamford Bridge. It was a battle that would end Hardrada – for a step-by-step account of the battle, please see the 'Hardrada's last hurrah' boxout – and, as history shows, have a profound effect on the course of England and Europe going forward.

Mere weeks after defeating Hardrada at Stamford Bridge, Godwinson himself would too be defeated by the Norman duke William, in large part due to troop exhaustion from the combat and enforced marching to and from York. As such, William became William the Conqueror, and instigated a centuries-long period of Norman rule over England, radically transforming its economy, language, architecture, law and education. Indeed, by the time the Norman presence in England had dissipated, the medieval age had long since transformed into the Renaissance, and its new, intoxicating culture, religion and science had swept away much of Europe's once-strong Viking presence.

When Harald Hardrada fell on the battlefield in England, it was more than just the flame of one great life being extinguished; it would prove to be the death of the last Viking warrior king.

Hardrada's lineage

Great great grandfather **Harald Fairhair**

850 – 932 CE

Noted by many historians to be the first King of Norway, Fairhair became a legendary figure during the Viking Age, with his deeds relayed in numerous epic sagas. He supposedly won many battles against Norwegian opponents on his way to becoming the country's ruler, and famously had anywhere between 11 to 20 sons.

Great grandfather/grandfather **Halfdan Sigurdsson of Hadafylke**

935 – 995 CE

Little is known about Hardrada's grandfather, other than that he was supposedly Halfdan Sigurdsson, the alleged son of King Sigurd Hrise of Norway, Hardrada's great grandfather. Both Hrise's and Halfdan's lineage is unconfirmed, with only information as passed down from Icelandic sagas mentioning their link to Harald.

Father **Sigurd Syr**

970 – 1018 CE

According to Icelandic sagas, Syr was a prudent and modest man who was known for hands-on approach to the management of his lands and properties. Records also indicate that he was a wealthy man, and that in 998 CE, chose to be baptised with his wife into the Christian faith.

Nephew **Magnus Olafsson**

1024 CE - 1047 CE

At times both King of Norway and King of Denmark, Hardrada's nephew Magnus garnered the nickname 'Magnus the Good'. He was crowned King of Norway at 11 and King of Denmark at 18, ruling both lands until his mysterious death aged 23. Upon his death the kingdoms were split, with Hardrada taking the Norwegian crown, and Sweyn Estridsson the Danish..

© Wikipedia

WILLIAM OF NORMANDY

1027/28 - 9 September 1087

Brief Bio

The bastard son of the Duke of Normandy survived all the many plots to dispose of him. Finally secure in his dukedom, William was convinced the throne of England should come to him on the death of Edward the Confessor. When Harold was crowned, William assembled the greatest invasion fleet of his time to claim the throne.

"William was touchy about his background, although enemies who sought to taunt him invariably regretted their jibes"

The bastard who would be king

William, a ruthless and calculating leader who nevertheless loved his wife and mother deeply, changed England and the English language forever

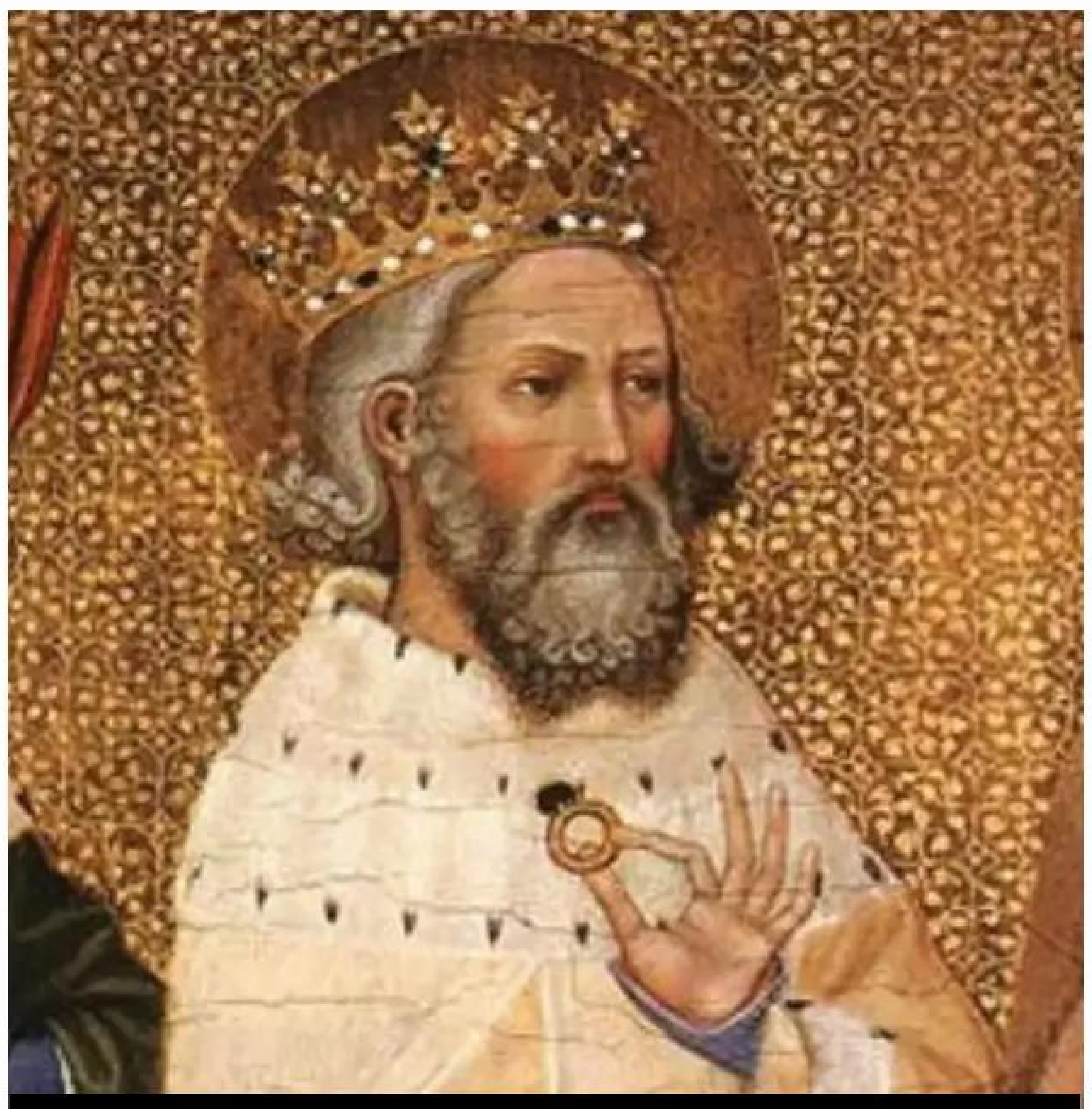
William was born in 1027 or 1028 to his mother, Herleva, who was the daughter of a tanner or undertaker. But his father, Robert, was Duke of Normandy. Such was the gap in status between his parents that Robert never married Herleva – although he saw that she was looked after and eventually married her off to a count with whom Herleva had two more sons. William was touchy about his humble background, although enemies who sought to taunt him about it invariably regretted their jibes.

The Normans were descendants of Vikings who had raided up the River Seine to Paris. Rather than fight them off, in 911 CE the French king, Charles the Simple, ceded the territory in the lower reaches of the Seine to Rollo, the Viking leader, in return for Rollo's promise that he would defend the kingdom against further Viking depredations. So the Norsemen became Normans and one of the most powerful dukedoms in France – at a time when dukes could be as powerful as the king.

> William appointed half-brother Odo as Bishop of Bayeux, when Odo was a teenager. After Hastings, he gave Odo Kent

Robert was such a duke, but in 1035 he decided to lay aside his dukedom and embark on the pilgrimage to the Holy Land. This was 60 years before the First Crusade, so Jerusalem was still under Muslim control, and a hazardous undertaking even for a rich and powerful duke. Before his departure, Robert gathered his magnates and made them swear to uphold his young son – William was only seven – as duke should he not return. He didn't. Robert made it to Jerusalem, weeping for a week at Christ's tomb, but fell sick and died on his way home. Robert died on 3 July 1035 and it must have taken months for the news to get back to Normandy. By the autumn, a young boy knew that he had lost a father and gained a dukedom. But, at the news, the wolves began to circle. A dukedom with a boy as leader was easy meat for predators. And they attacked.

Without the strong arm of Duke Robert to keep order among his nobles, rich and powerful families turned on each other in a struggle for dominance. The fighting was savage and brutal: one nobleman was caught by his enemies at his wedding and had his ears and nose cut off and his eyes put out. Duke Robert, suspecting this might happen, had put William under the protection of his most powerful deputies but, one by one, these men were killed. The violence crept closer and closer to the young boy. William's tutor was killed and then his steward, asleep in the same chamber as his young charge,



Despite his wishes, Edward's plans for William to succeed him didn't come to bear fruit

When William met Edward

William knew Edward, future king of England, from his boyhood. For when William was born, Edward was a young prince living in exile with his mother's relatives in Normandy, having been exiled by Cnut when he took the throne and married Edward's mother, Emma. William was in his early teens when Edward returned to England under the orders of Harthacnut, son of Cnut and Emma, the unexpected king. But Edward retained close links with the court where he had grown up and after the crisis with the Godwin family in 1051, detailed in the chapter on Edward the Confessor (p36), Edward sent across the Channel for William to come visit him at court.

According to one of the versions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, William did just that. Around October or November of 1051, William with his retinue visited Edward to pay their respects to the king. The duke came as the king's vassal, but the king had a great gift to impart to his new vassal: the promise of the English throne. With Edward rid of the threat of the Godwins, he felt himself able to promise the throne to whomever he wished, and William was the son of the people who had sheltered and helped him through his long childhood exile. So William returned to Normandy convinced that, if Edward remained childless (which was likely, since the pious king was thought to have taken an oath of celibacy), then the throne of England would come to him. But did Edward have the authority to promise the crown to William? There were no hard and fast rules of succession; the king's wish was important but it was not paramount, for the succession depended also on the assent of England's magnates, and they were certainly not keen on a Norman king, and even less so once the Godwins returned to power in 1052.

had his throat slit. So dangerous had it become for William that his uncle – his mother's brother – smuggled him out of the castle at night and put him up in the cottages of peasants and labourers.

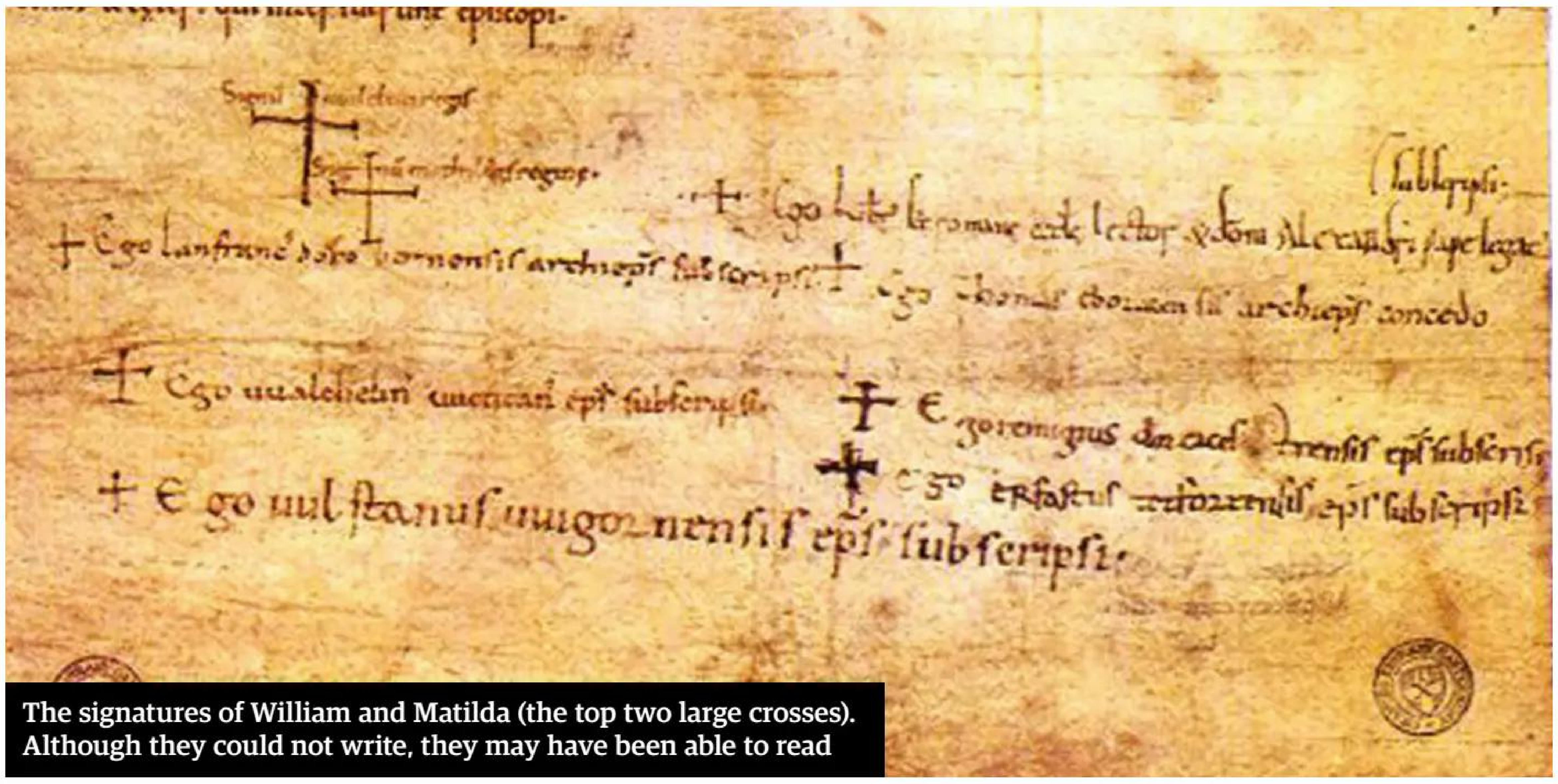
Amid such dangers, it was imperative that William take up arms as soon as possible. Somewhere around his fifteenth year, William did. But the nobles who nominally owed William their obedience had become used to going their own way through the years of his minority and they weren't going to accept the rule of the young duke without a struggle. Slowly, William exerted his authority, but that simply provoked a greater reaction and, late in 1046, defiance turned into open revolt. At this time, dukes and kings were peripatetic, moving regularly around their domains, and William was visiting Valognes in the west of Normandy when he was pulled from his bed with the news that his life was in immediate danger. Leaping on a horse, William fled, avoiding towns for fear he would be recognised and killed.

Having escaped the assassins, William learned that the rebellion against him involved some of his most powerful nobles – too many of them for him to fight on his own. So the proud young man was forced to go before his lord, Henri I, King of France, and beg his aid against the rebels. Henri acceded to the wish of his vassal and marched his army alongside those men loyal to William back into Normandy. But the rebels did not back down. Rather, they marched east to meet William and Henri. The battle occurred at Val-ès-Dunes, south east of Caen, in a landscape of plains and rivers. And William won. With the backing of Henri, he defeated the rebels and went a long way towards securing his dukedom. He was 19 or 20 years old.

But to really feel secure in his realm, William needed allies and the best way for a young duke to cement an alliance was by marriage to the daughter of a powerful magnate. Marriage would also provide that other essential ingredient for long-term political stability: an heir. Casting

> William made his other half-brother, Robert, count of Mortain. Robert was one of his key lieutenants, before and after Hastings

> "Amid such dangers, it was imperative William take up arms. Somewhere around his fifteenth year, he did"



The signatures of William and Matilda (the top two large crosses). Although they could not write, they may have been able to read

Timeline

911

The Vikings settle
In 911, King Charles the Simple signed the Treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte with the Viking leader, Rollo, ceding the land between the River Epte and the sea, but only if Rollo defends the land and accept baptism. Rollo does, and in a generation pagan Norseman become the devoutly Christian Normans.

1002

The marriage that led to conquest
In 1002, Emma, the sister of Richard the Good, married Æthelred, King of England. Emma had two sons with Æthelred, Edward and Alfred.

1026

Battling brothers
William's father, Robert, rebelled against his brother, Richard, the new duke of Normandy. The elder brother quelled his younger brother's revolt, forcing Robert to swear fealty to him.

1027/1028

William is born
A son is born to Robert, Duke of Normandy, and his mistress, Herleva. The birth is illegitimate and William is often referred to as 'William the Bastard'.

1035

The Duke is dead…
Early in 1035, William's father leaves Normandy to go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. In July 1035 William's father, Robert the Magnificent, dies on his journey back home from Jerusalem.

IN·SINV·TEMPLI·ROLLO·QVIESCIT
A·SE ASTATAE·CONDITAE·NORMANNIAE·PATER·AC·PRIMVS· VX
LABOR QVI·FRACTVS·OCCVBVIT·OCTOGENARIO·MAIOR·AN·CM XXIII

The grave of Rollo of Normandy in Rouen Cathedral – even Vikings stop wandering in the end

around, William and his advisors found a suitable match: Matilda, daughter of Count Baldwin of Flanders. Flanders was one of the most powerful principalities in the region; an alliance would help both William and Baldwin, who had recently gone head-to-head with Henry the Black, the Holy Roman Emperor, and Pope Leo IX. Baldwin was happy with the match but the pope was not: initially, he forbade it. However, some politicking by William's bishops and abbots ensured the pope's acceptance of the marriage and, sometime around 1050, William married Matilda. It was to prove a long and happy marriage. Matilda bore William at least nine children, and William, showing the trust he placed in his wife, generally left her as regent of Normandy and, later, England when he was away. Even more unusually for a king of this time, William was completely faithful to Matilda: the Bastard produced no bastards.

Not long after his marriage, William faced the greatest external threat to his dukedom in the fearsome shape of Geoffrey Martel, count of Anjou. 'Martel' was the name he gave himself and it means the 'hammer': William had met a man who was his match. But it happens that William was just as brutal as the Hammer, and more cunning. When the men manning the castle defending the town of Alençon poked fun at William's mother, holding up animal skins and shouting that the duke was the son of a tanner, the besieging duke drove his soldiers on to quickly take the castle. Then, making sure the people of Alençon could see, William marched the captured defenders who had mocked him out in front of the town walls and had them maimed, cutting their hands and feet off. Seeing this, not surprisingly the inhabitants of Alençon surrendered.

But if William thought he had deterred the Hammer, he was mistaken. There was another magnate who was looking with alarm at William's growing power and he the greatest of all: King Henri. In 1054, King Henri, with Geoffrey Martel alongside him, rode into Normandy intending to reduce the duchy to a smoking pile of cinders. In response, William shadowed Henri's army, seeking to stop the soldiers ravaging and raising supplies while avoiding a pitched battle. Henri had dispatched a separate army to ravage northern Normandy but a separate force of Norman knights managed to take this army by surprise and defeat it. When the news reached Henri, reportedly shouted into his camp by one of William's heralds, calling from the top of a tree, the king had no choice but to withdraw. William had beaten off the invasion.

William nicknamed his eldest son, Robert, 'Curthose', which can be translated as 'Shortypants'. Relations were strained

1035

Long live the Duke
News reaches Normandy that Robert is dead and William, still a boy, becomes the Duke of Normandy.

1047

Defeats rebels
William manages to win a decisive victory against rebels in the Battle of Val-ès-Dunes.

1050

A married man
William marries Matilda, the daughter of the Count of Flanders.

1051

Promised a throne
William meets King Edward, who promises him the throne of England should Edward remain childless.

c.1051

An heir is born
William's first child, a son, Robert Curthose is born.

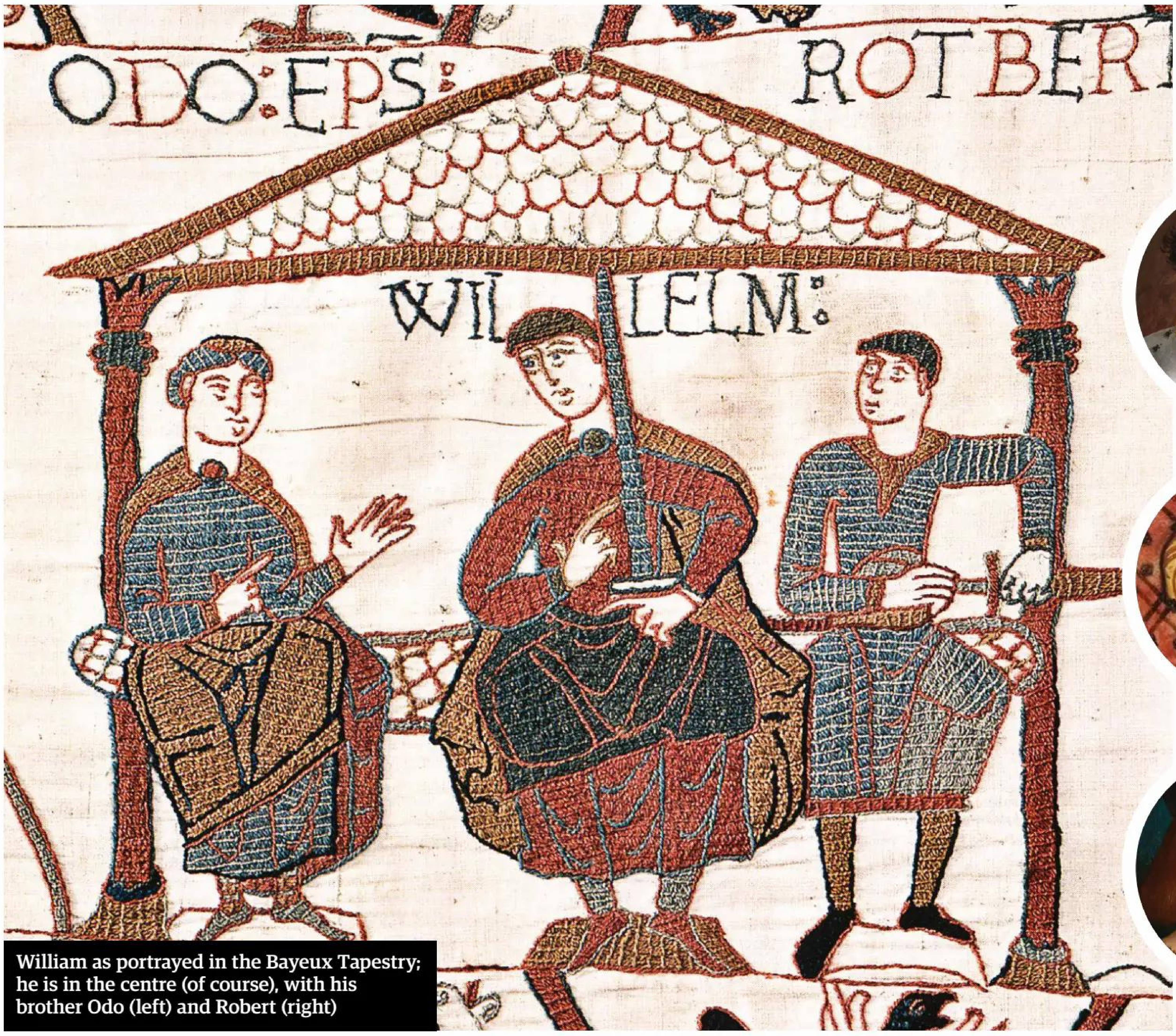
However, kings do not take defeat by vassals lightly. Three years later, in 1057/8, Henri invaded again, marching right through Normandy with the Hammer beside him, ravaging as he went, until he reached the coast of Normandy. William had again been shadowing the king's progress without daring to confront him. But when Henri forded the River Dives, a chance suddenly presented itself to the duke. For the tide started to come in before Henri could get all his army across the river, leaving his rearguard stranded on the far bank. Seeing them, cut off from the main body of the army, William took his chance. He attacked. Under the horrified but helpless gaze of the king, stranded on the other side of the river, the Norman knights slaughtered the rearguard. Having suffered such losses, Henri had no choice but to retreat.

William had a passion for hunting that, after the Conquest, would translate into the creation of huge new hunting grounds in England

William must have hoped the defeat would secure his dukedom, but there was no guarantee that the king would not turn once more against his over-mighty vassal. However, a greater power than even a mighty duke would shortly turn its eyes upon Henri and Geoffrey: death. Both men died, from natural causes, in 1060. William could breathe easy.

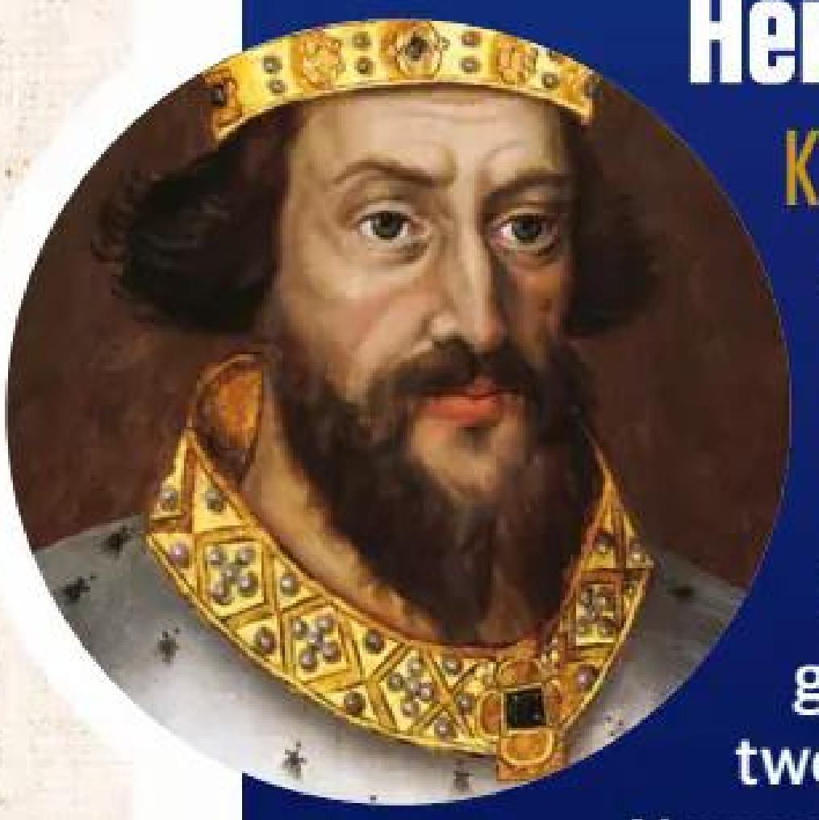
The two greatest threats to his dukedom were gone and Henri's heir was only eight. With his rivals gone, William did what medieval warlords always did in such circumstances: annexing land. William occupied the neighbouring county of Maine, harrying it into submission by devastating its fields and villages and vineyards.

Across the Channel, King Edward the Confessor was aging and childless. However, William had received reports of the growing power of the Godwinson family. Edward had married the daughter of Earl Godwin, and though the earl had died, his sons, Harold, Tosting, Gyrth and Leofric, now controlled much of England. They were the real power in the land and a definite threat to William's ambition to claim the crown of England. So it would have been with great interest that William received the news that Harold Godwinson had fetched up on the coast of north France and was being held prisoner by Count Guy of Ponthieu. It was 1064.



William as portrayed in the Bayeux Tapestry; he is in the centre (of course), with his brother Odo (left) and Robert (right)

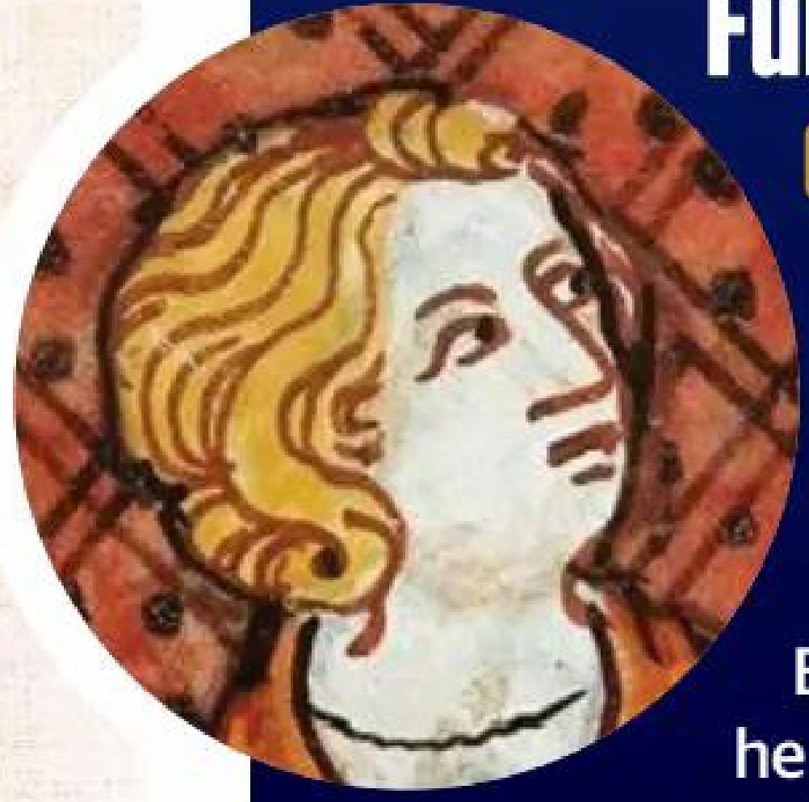
French continental rivals



Henri I

KING OF FRANCE

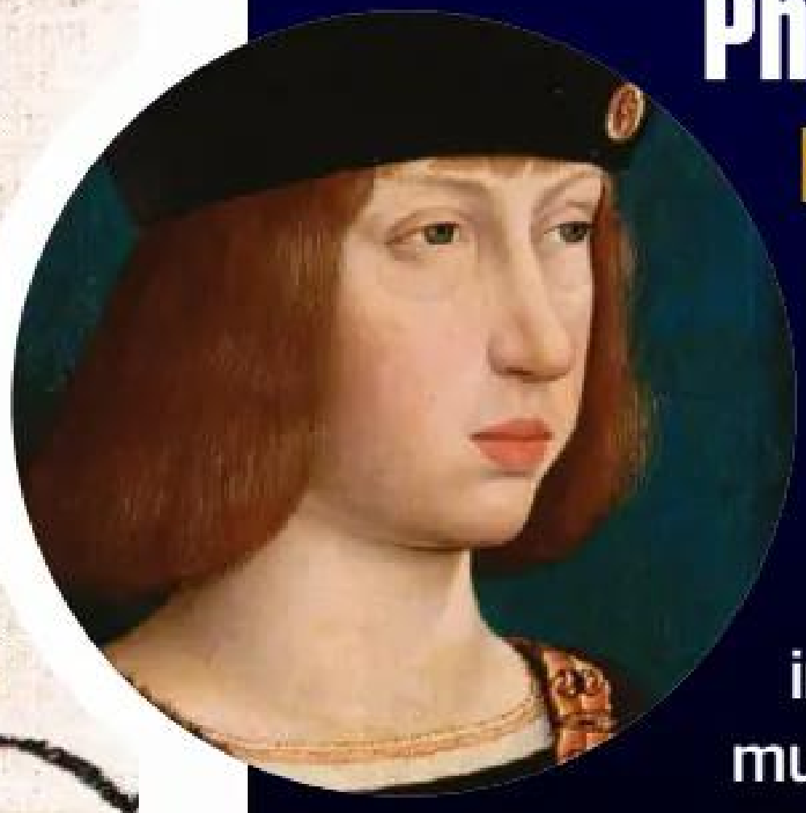
After helping William keep control over his duchy at the Battle of Val-ès-Dunes in 1047, Henri soon became threatened by the new duke's growing power. The king led two unsuccessful invasions of Normandy in 1053-4 and 1057.



Fulk IV le Réchin

COUNT OF ANJOU

Once he seized the county from his brother, Geoffrey III, in 1068, Count Fulk of Anjou secured an alliance with King Philip against William. Beginning in the early-1070s, he attempted to reclaim Maine on several occasions, but failed.



Philip I

KING OF FRANCE

Threatened by his vassal as king of England, Philip made alliances with Anjou and Flanders to counter the strength of Normandy. Philip's insult infuriated William so much that his enthusiasm to seek vengeance at Mantes led to his death.

Timeline (cont)

1054

Trouble with the King
King Henri of France and Count Geoffrey attack Normandy. William manages to repel the attack.

c.1054

A second son
William's second child, another boy, is born. He is called Richard, after his uncle.

c.1056

A third son
William's third son, William Rufus, is born. He will go on to become King of England after William.

1057

More trouble with the King
King Henri and Count Geoffrey unleash another attack. William defeats them.

1060

The King (and Count) are dead
King Henri and Count Geoffrey both die. William's most dangerous enemies are out of the way.

1064

The Earl comes calling
Earl Harold of Wessex is taken prisoner by the Count of Ponthieu when his ship lands there. William orders his release and takes Harold with him to Normandy.

The House of Normandy

ROLLO
Count of Rouen 911-927

WILLIAM
'Longsword'
Count of Rouen 927-942

RICHARD I
'the Fearless'
Duke of Normandy 942-996

RICHARD II
'the Good'
Duke of Normandy 996-1027

RICHARD III
Duke of Normandy 1027

ROBERT I
'the Magnificent'
Duke of Normandy 1027-35

WILLIAM II (KING WILLIAM I)
'the Conqueror'
Duke of Normandy 1035-87
King of England 1066-87

ROBERT II
'Curthose'
Duke of Normandy 1087-1106

WILLIAM II
'Rufus'
King of England 1087-1100
Ducal Regent 1096-1100

HENRY I
'Beauclerc'
King of England 1100-35
Duke of Normandy 1106-35

ADELA
M. STEPHEN II
Count of Blois
Lived c.1067-1137

WILLIAM CLITO
Count of Flanders
Ducal claimant

STEPHEN
King of England 1135-54

GEOFFREY
Count of Anjou
Duke of Normandy 1144-50

MATILDA I
Lady of the English
Queen 1066-1083

WILLIAM III ADELIN
Duke of Normandy 1120
in his father's lifetime

HENRY II
Duke of Normandy 1150-89
King of England 1154-89

RICHARD IV (KING RICHARD I)
'Lionheart'
Duke of Normandy &
King of England 1189-99

GEOFFREY
'Geoffrey Plantagenet'
Archbishop of York
1189-1212

JOHN
'Lackland'
Duke of Normandy
& King of England 1199-1216

HENRY III
Duke of Normandy 1216-59
(renounced at Treaty of Paris)
King of England 1216-72

Clash of crowns: 1066

When three kings rose to claim Edward the Confessor's crown, England's fate would be decided with steel and blood

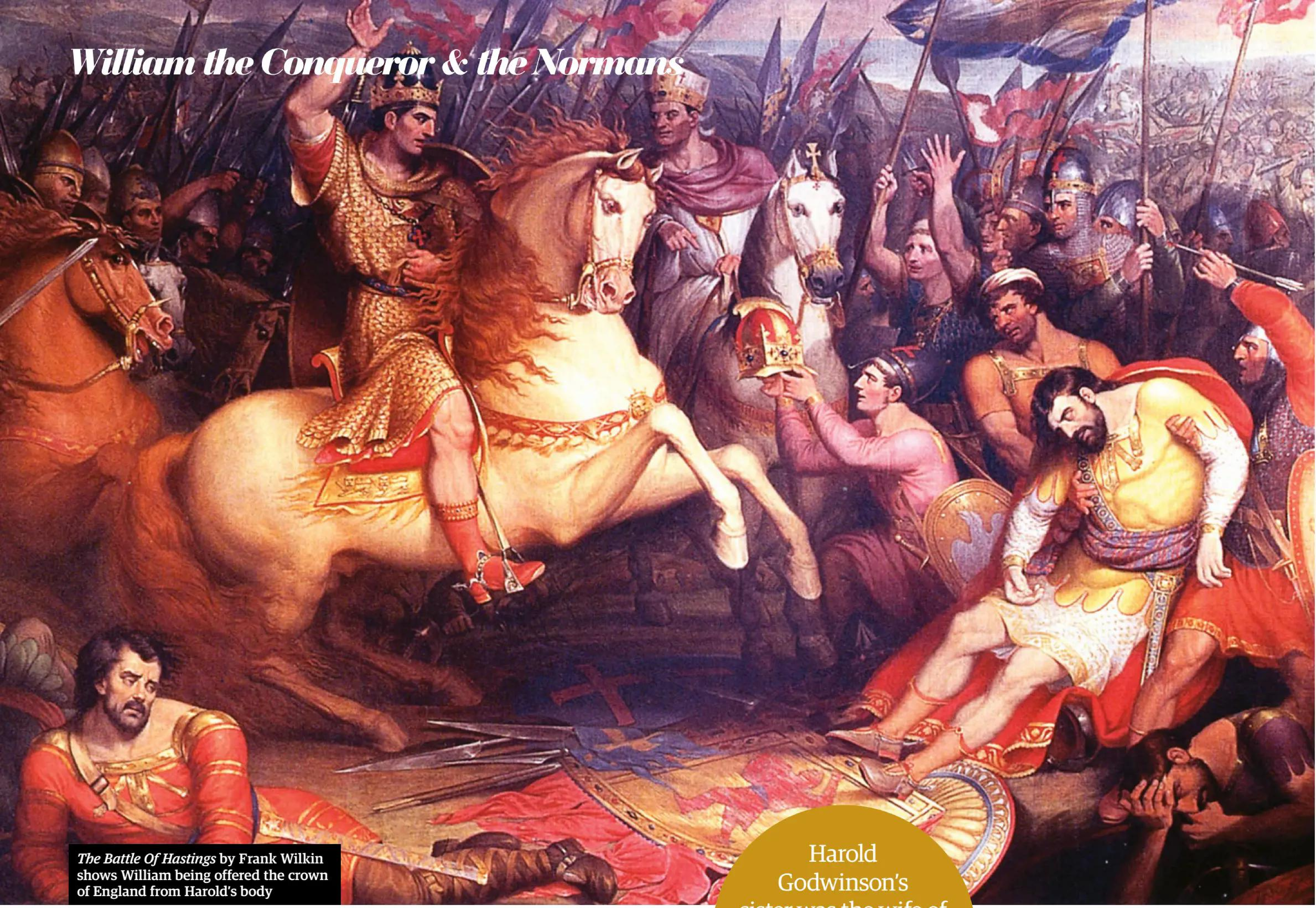
Harold Godwinson's army was exhausted. Just weeks ago they had claimed victory against a Nordic invasion in a long, brutal battle at Stamford Bridge. They had marched approximately 400 kilometres with their weapons, gear and armour. It was during this march that Harold had received news of William of Normandy's landing on the shore of Pevensey. With a great deal of his men still in the north, Harold had no choice but to push onwards to meet the infamous Norman Bastard in combat. As Harold stood on the hill overlooking what is today the town of Battle, near Hastings, with his banners wafting in the morning breeze, he observed his army – they were wearied, sick, and many were still nursing wounds from Stamford. But there was nothing he could do, these were the men with whom England's fate rested, for William was coming for his crown whether he was ready or not.

Edward the Confessor (so called for his piety) had reigned for 23 years, fairly long for an Anglo-Saxon monarch, but he had not borne any heirs. In fact, Edward had turned this to his advantage. With so many ambitious nobles jostling for position, he used the inheritance of his kingdom as a diplomatic tool, and one that, he was likely aware, he would not personally feel the repercussions of. However, this was all fated to come to a head: towards the end of 1065, Edward became severely ill and fell into a coma. He briefly regained consciousness long enough to place his widow and his kingdom under the protection of his brother-in-law, Harold Godwinson, before passing away.

There is much debate over what exactly Edward meant by 'protection', and whether he was actually bestowing Harold his kingdom or just employing him to help the next man who would rule it. However, these arguments are, on the whole, irrelevant. Although he was free to nominate a man of his choosing, it wasn't an Anglo-Saxon king's right to decide who would be his successor; that responsibility instead fell to the Witenaġemot, the king's council of advisers. The Witenaġemot had already begun to debate who would be the right man for the job before Edward's death. They decreed that he needed to be English, of good character and of royal blood – and luckily for Harold, he ticked all these boxes.

> Harold Godwinson and William both had claims to the English throne; Harald Hardrada was an opportunist

Despite a tumultuous family history, Harold had steadfastly and loyally served Edward for years, eventually becoming a trusted adviser. As Earl of



The Battle Of Hastings by Frank Wilkin shows William being offered the crown of England from Harold's body

Wessex, he was already one of the most powerful men in the country, and he had proved himself multiple times in battle. Edward had also married Harold's sister and his family had ties with Cnut the Great. Perhaps most importantly, Harold held esteem with the elite of English society – he was well liked and reliable. In fact, Harold's worthiness was so unanimously agreed by the Witenaġemot that no other names were even suggested. William and other contenders would later claim that Harold had stolen the throne, even that he had murdered Edward to do it, but Harold didn't 'grab' the kingdom, he was gifted it.

Harold seemed to be the perfect king: he was tall, eloquent and a skilled soldier, however, his reign would be one of the most turbulent and infamous in English history. Someone else had his gaze fixed on Edward's throne, and when Harold was crowned, William, duke of Normandy, was furious. William fervently believed England was his by birthright as he and Edward were distant cousins. He also claimed that some years earlier Edward had stated that he was his successor, and this message had been carried to him by none other than Harold Godwinson himself.

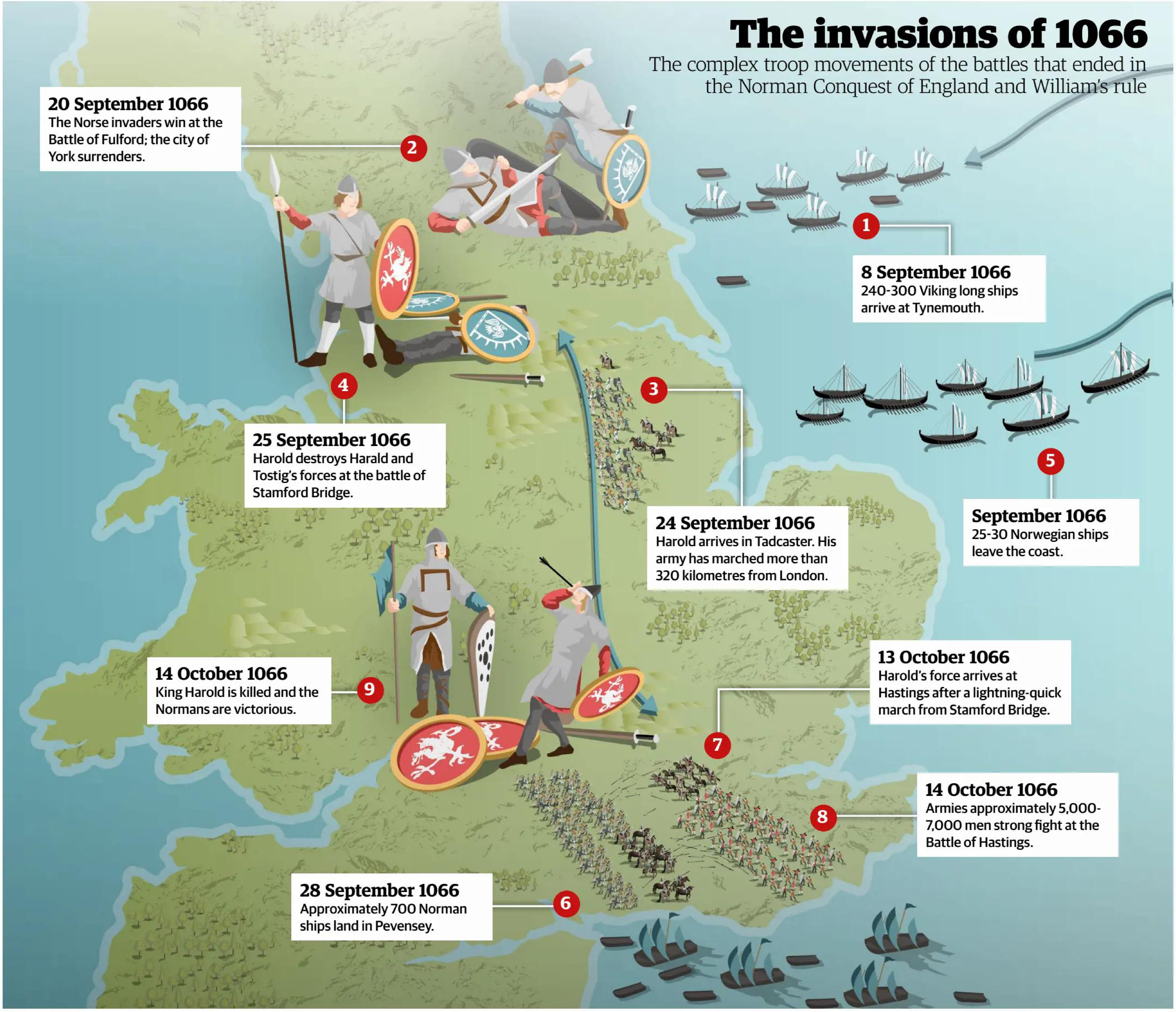
The legitimacy of this story is in some dispute, certainly Edward likely promised the kingdom to a host of nobles throughout his reign, but William did not seem to understand that England was not Edward's to give. No other action in Edward's reign indicates that he had chosen William to be his heir. The duke, however, was convinced that the kingdom was his, and set his sights on usurping the ambitious upstart, Harold Godwinson. He immediately made plans to invade England, building a fleet of around 700 ships to carry his army across the English Channel.

Initially William struggled to gain support for his invasion, but when he revealed that Harold had apparently sworn upon sacred relics that he would support William's claim, the church became involved. The finances and nobles provided by the church swelled William's pockets and his army. Harold, well aware of the fiery duke's intentions, assembled his army on the Isle of Wight. However, William did not come. Unfavourable winds halted the would-be conqueror's ships and, with his provisions running low, Harold disbanded his army and returned to London.

Harold probably knew that William would be coming sooner rather than later, however, he had another issue to deal with – sibling rivalry. On the same day as Harold's return to London, Harald Hardrada of Norway, also known as the last great Viking king, landed his fleet of longships on the mouth of the Tyne and joined up with Tostig Godwinson, Harold's younger brother.

Harold Godwinson's sister was the wife of Edward the Confessor, and his family were one of England's most powerful

Tostig had previously ruled the kingdom of Northumbria, an earldom stretching from the Humber to the Tweed, but his brutal and heavy-handed tendencies had caused him to grow increasingly unpopular with his subjects. In 1065, the thegns of York occupied the city, killed Tostig's officials and outlawed the man himself. The rebels were so furious with Tostig that they demanded Edward exile him, however, it wasn't the king who met with them, but his loyal advisor Harold. Using his strong influence, Harold had Tostig officially outlawed. But the younger brother was not one to take things lying down, and at a meeting of the king and his council, he intervened and publicly accused Harold of conspiring against him. Harold, already aware of the dire state of England at the time, and the imminent threat of William, exiled his own brother. It is likely that Harold took the action he did against his own kin to ensure peace and loyalty in the north – an impossibility with Tostig in charge. However, his brother resented him for it. As he fled England and took refuge in Flanders, Tostig let fantasies of vengeance consume him and began to plot his return. Tostig knew he didn't have enough power alone to topple his older brother, so he set about making powerful alliances; he even sought an alliance with William before finally striking gold with King Harald III of Norway.



The invasions of 1066

The complex troop movements of the battles that ended in the Norman Conquest of England and William's rule

8 September 1066
240-300 Viking long ships arrive at Tynemouth.

20 September 1066
The Norse invaders win at the Battle of Fulford; the city of York surrenders.

24 September 1066
Harold arrives in Tadcaster. His army has marched more than 320 kilometres from London.

25 September 1066
Harold destroys Harald and Tostig's forces at the battle of Stamford Bridge.

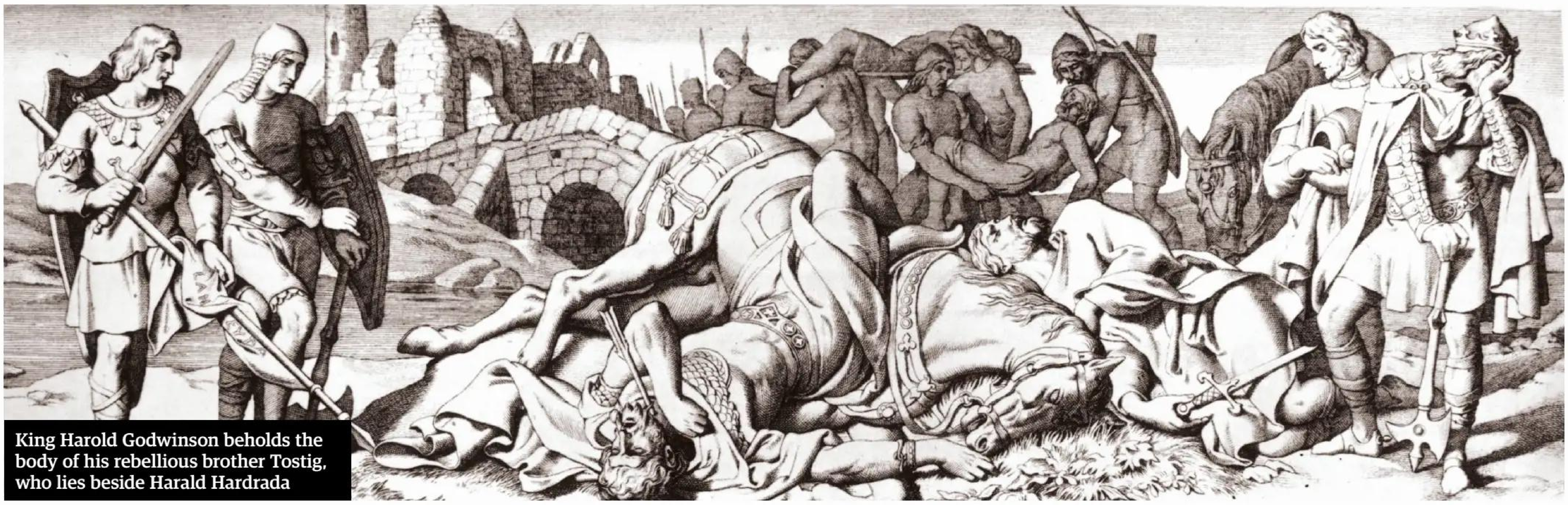
September 1066
25-30 Norwegian ships leave the coast.

28 September 1066
Approximately 700 Norman ships land in Pevensey.

13 October 1066
Harold's force arrives at Hastings after a lightning-quick march from Stamford Bridge.

14 October 1066
Armies approximately 5,000-7,000 men strong fight at the Battle of Hastings.

14 October 1066
King Harold is killed and the Normans are victorious.



King Harold Godwinson beholds the body of his rebellious brother Tostig, who lies beside Harald Hardrada

Hardrada's claim to the throne was even looser than William's. England had previously been ruled by the king of Denmark, Harthacnut, who made an agreement with Magnus, the king of Norway, that if one of them died without an heir, the other would inherit his throne. Harthacnut died childless, so Magnus took the crown of Denmark. However, Edward the Confessor was crowned king of England in his absence. Harald was Magnus's uncle and his co-king, so believed England belonged to him. The idea that his kingdom was being ruled by the son of one of Edward's advisers was outrageous for the Nordic king, and he set his sights on expanding his kingdom.

Whether Hardrada made an agreement with Tostig before setting sail or not is unknown, but either way Hardrada departed in August and met up with Tostig on 8 September. It was clear that Tostig needed Hardrada's help with the invasion, he had a mere 12 ships to Hardrada's 240 minimum. Hardrada spent some time sacking and burning coastal villages, but he then set his sights on York, Tostig's old stomping ground. Hardrada had the men and Tostig knew the lay of the land better than anyone, so together they made an alarming foe to be reckoned with.

The two men who would have to face this united force were Edwin and Morcar, the ealdormen of Mercia and Northumbria. They knew of Tostig and Hardrada's advances through their lands and had already gathered their forces, approximately 5,000 strong, to take down the invaders in what they expected to be a straightforward battle. The armies finally met at Fulford, on the outskirts of York.

The scene of the clash was wet and sodden marshland. The English positioned themselves with the River Ouse on their right flank and the swampy area on their left, a tactic that relied on both flanks holding their own against the invaders. Hardrada, meanwhile, had to think quickly – the English army had confronted him before he could assemble all his men, and many of them were hours away, so he had to be cunning with his deployment. He placed his less experienced troops to the right and kept his best troops with him on the riverbank. The English had caught wind of Harald's delays and so struck quickly. They charged forward against the Norwegian line and, immediately overwhelmed, the Nordics were pushed all the way back to the marshlands.

Hardrada then saw his chance. As the English advanced, he sent the bulk of his troops to sweep around them in a pincer movement, trapping them against the ditch and separating them from the other English flank. As more Norwegians arrived, they opened up a third front against the Anglo-Saxons. The combat in the marshland was brutal and ferocious, with both armies fighting frantically through the thick, sludgy mud. However, the English were now outnumbered by the Norse men, many of them were unable to escape the ditch and those that managed to climb out fled for their lives.

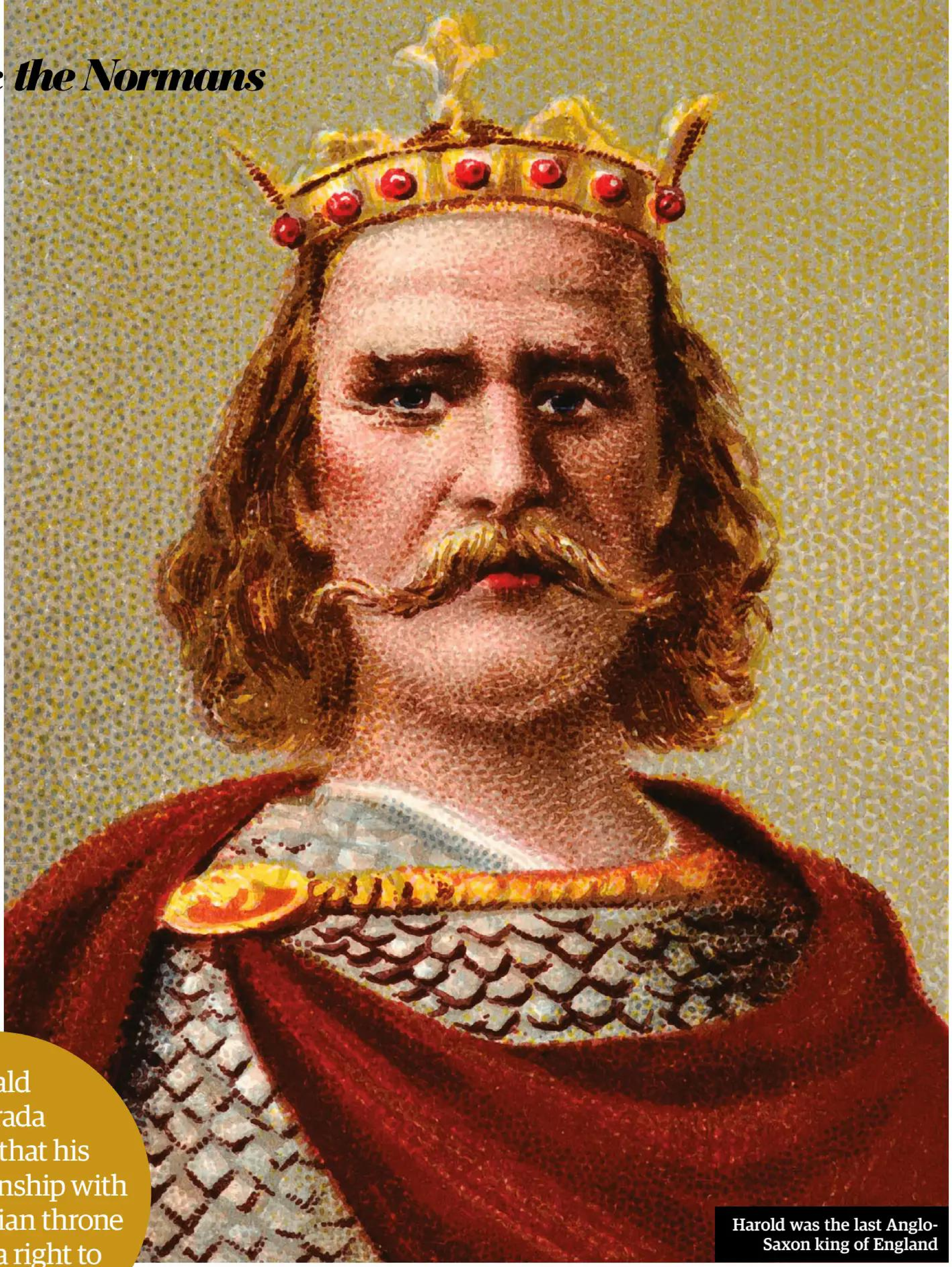
Eventually there were so many English bodies strewn across the ground that the invaders could advance without getting their feet wet.

With such a definite defeat, York was promptly surrendered to Hardrada and Tostig with the promise that they would not force entry. This was accepted, perhaps because the duo did not wish to subject their new capital to looting. Instead they arranged that various hostages would be handed over at Stamford Bridge, some 11 kilometres away, which is where the two men chose to retire. The battle at Fulford would not only be Hardrada's last victory, but it would be the last time a largely Scandinavian army would defeat the English.

Little did the victorious invaders know, Harold and his men had been marching day and night from London. Despite the imminent threat of an invasion by William, Harold was so determined to repel the invaders that he and his army achieved the astounding feat of travelling almost 300 kilometres in just four days. Tostig and Hardrada were likely expecting Harold's eventual rebuttal but neither of them had any comprehension of the monumental journey that the king and his army had embarked on, and neither of them suspected a thing as they headed to Stamford Bridge to collect their additional hostages.

Spirits were high for the invaders' men; many of them had even left their armour behind on their ships, and some were simply relaxing in the meadows or out hunting when they spied Harold's men. From the south streamed a horde of Anglo-Saxons fully armed and ready for battle. There is no doubt that the English would have been exhausted, but the Norse were completely and utterly unprepared. According to one account, a brave man rode up to Hardrada and Tostig before the battle began, offering the rebellious brother his earldom if he would turn on the Nordic king. Tostig then asked the rider what Hardrada would get, to which the rider replied, "Six feet of ground… or as much more as he needs, as he is taller than most men." Impressed by the rider, Hardrada asked Tostig for his name; Tostig revealed that it was none other than Harold himself.

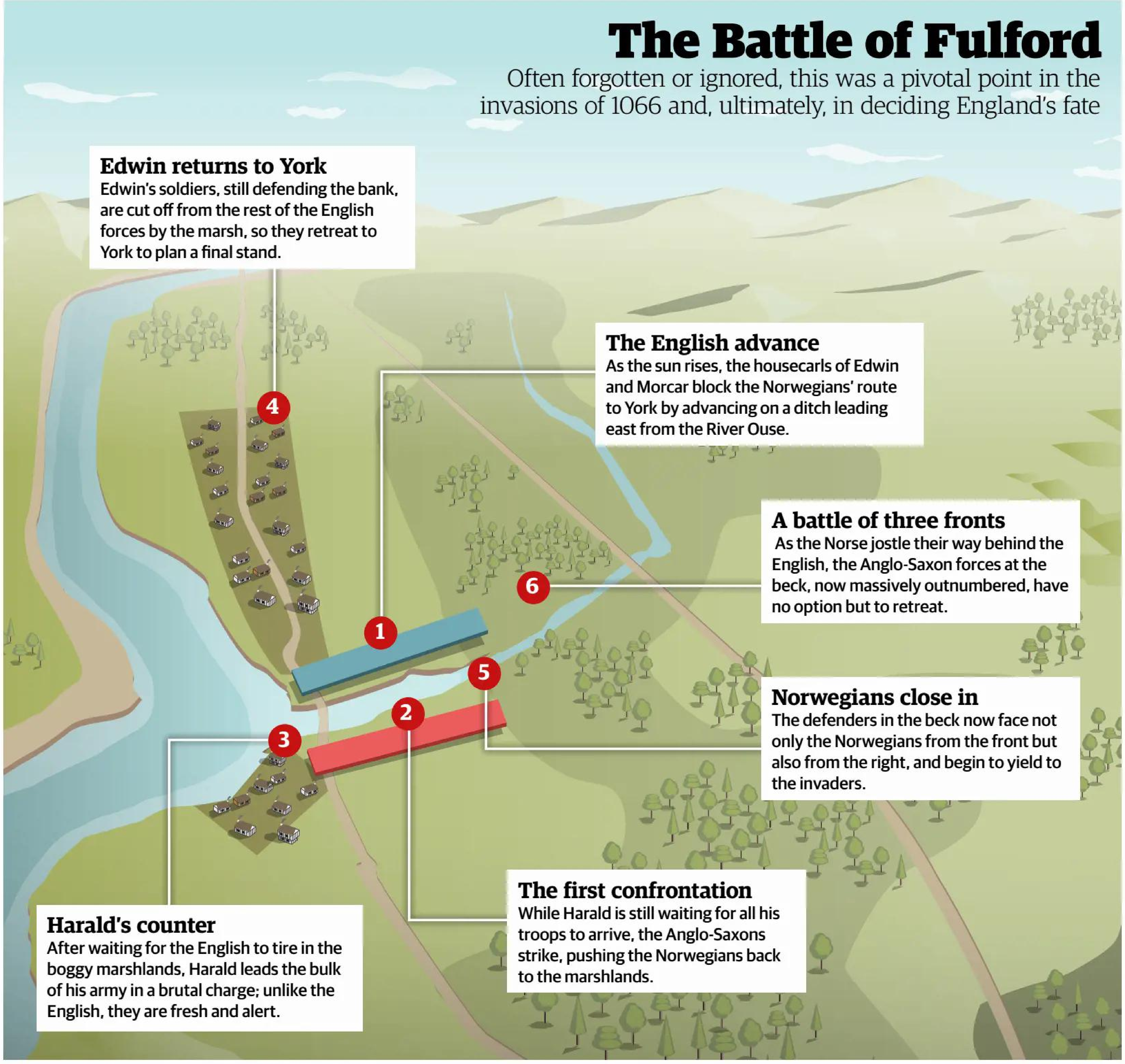
Harald Hardrada believed that his fiscal relationship with the Norwegian throne gave him a right to England's crown



Harold was the last Anglo-Saxon king of England

The Battle of Fulford

Often forgotten or ignored, this was a pivotal point in the invasions of 1066 and, ultimately, in deciding England's fate



The English advance
As the sun rises, the housecarls of Edwin and Morcar block the Norwegians' route to York by advancing on a ditch leading east from the River Ouse.

The first confrontation
While Harald is still waiting for all his troops to arrive, the Anglo-Saxons strike, pushing the Norwegians back to the marshlands.

Harald's counter
After waiting for the English to tire in the boggy marshlands, Harald leads the bulk of his army in a brutal charge; unlike the English, they are fresh and alert.

Edwin returns to York
Edwin's soldiers, still defending the bank, are cut off from the rest of the English forces by the marsh, so they retreat to York to plan a final stand.

Norwegians close in
The defenders in the beck now face not only the Norwegians from the front but also from the right, and begin to yield to the invaders.

A battle of three fronts
As the Norse jostle their way behind the English, the Anglo-Saxon forces at the beck, now massively outnumbered, have no option but to retreat.

NORWEGIANS

COMMANDERS: Harald Hardrada, Tostig Godwinson

TROOPS: Approx 10,000, of which 6,000 were deployed

KEY UNIT: Experienced warriors positioned on the firm ground near the riverbank

STRENGTHS: Strong starting position, which gave Harald the higher ground, and sheer force of numbers

WEAKNESSES: None

CASUALTIES AND LOSSES: Approximately 750

VS

SAXONS

COMMANDERS: Morcar of Northumbria, Edwin of Mercia

TROOPS: Approx 5,000

KEY UNIT: Shieldmen

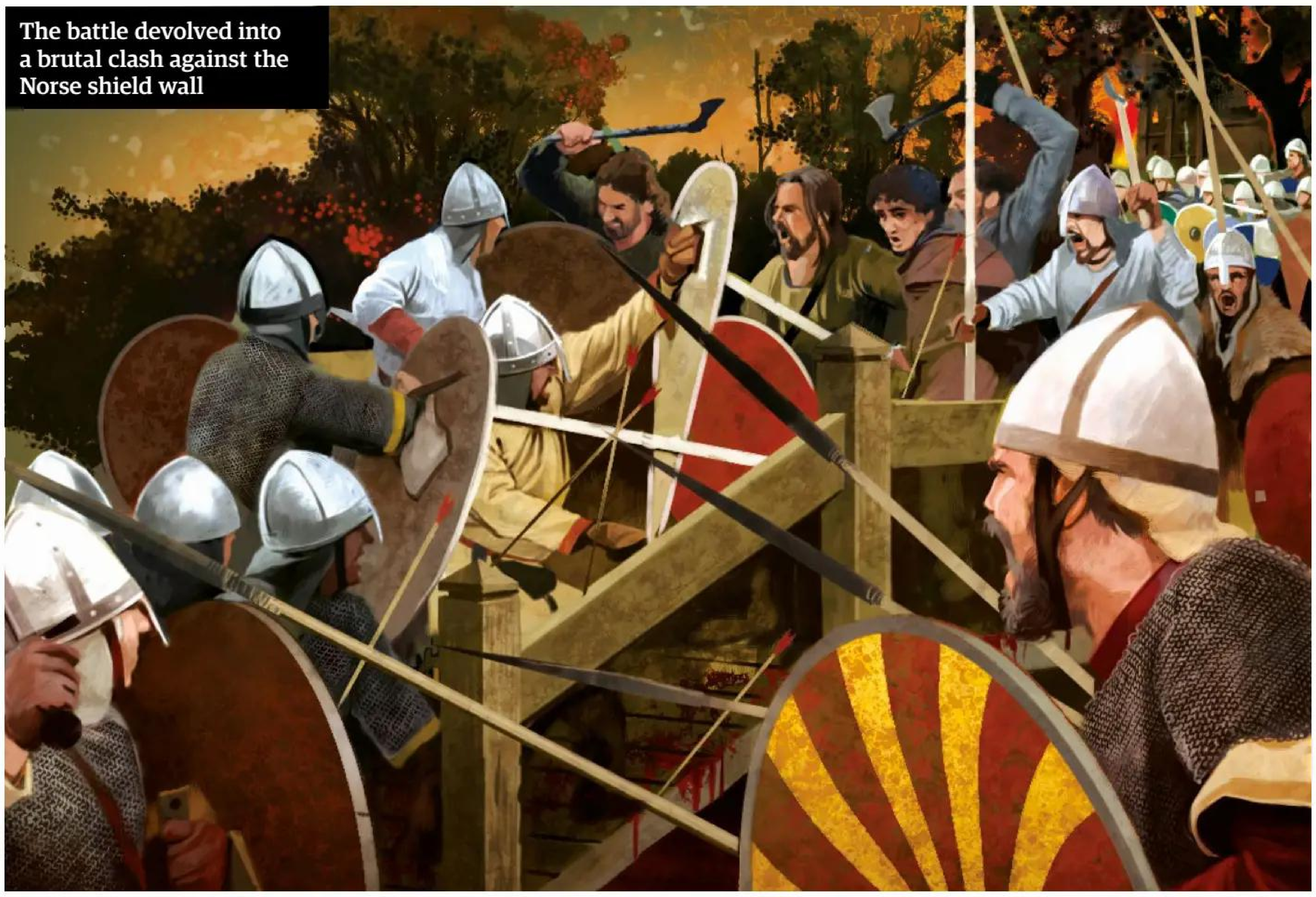
STRENGTHS: An early attack before the full Viking force arrived

WEAKNESSES: Disadvantaged starting position, boggy land

CASUALTIES AND LOSSES: Up to 1,000

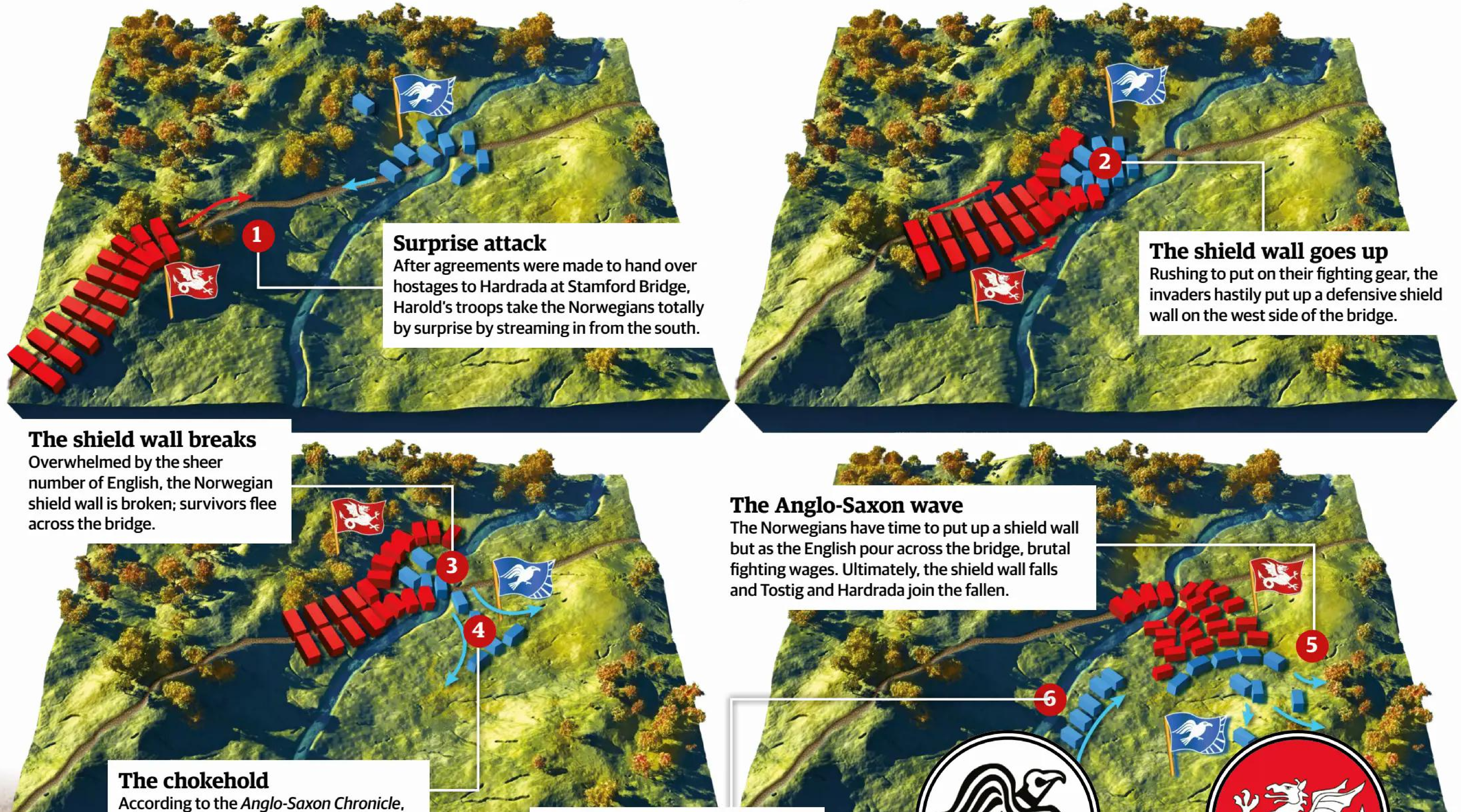
Whether this account is true or not, neither party was in the mood for deals or truces, this was to be decided once and for all the old fashioned way. Once the scrambled Nordic forces gathered together, they deployed in a defensive position. The English cut through the invaders on the west side of the River Derwent with ease, however, the bridge itself presented them with problems. They would have to pass through the vulnerable chokehold to continue their advance, and according to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, one man stood in their way. A huge Norse axe-man guarded the narrow crossing of the bridge alone, holding back the entire English army. He brutally cut down anyone who approached, until eventually he was defeated by an English soldier who floated downstream in a barrel and thrust his spear up through the bridge.

This delay gave the Nordics time to assemble a triangular shield wall, and this was where the real battle began. The tired but determined Anglo-Saxons clashed repeatedly against the Nordic shields, hammering them over and over again. The fighting lasted for hours, with the advantage changing hands many times throughout. However,


The battle devolved into a brutal clash against the Norse shield wall

The Battle of Stamford Bridge

Harold's men finally met the invaders at Stamford Bridge in a battle that would make and break the English king



Surprise attack
After agreements were made to hand over hostages to Hardrada at Stamford Bridge, Harold's troops take the Norwegians totally by surprise by streaming in from the south.

The shield wall goes up
Rushing to put on their fighting gear, the invaders hastily put up a defensive shield wall on the west side of the bridge.

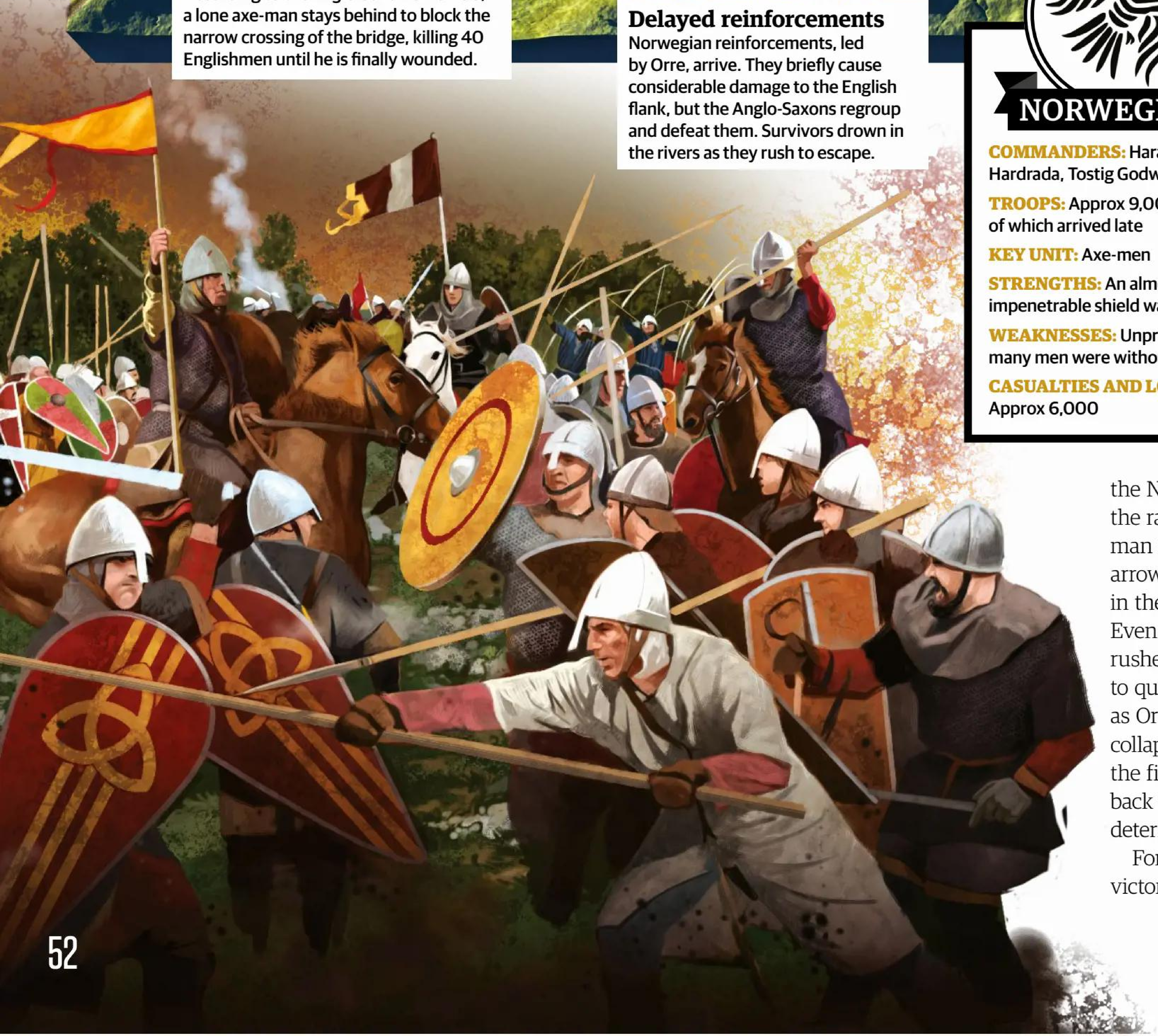
The shield wall breaks
Overwhelmed by the sheer number of English, the Norwegian shield wall is broken; survivors flee across the bridge.

The chokehold
According to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, a lone axe-man stays behind to block the narrow crossing of the bridge, killing 40 Englishmen until he is finally wounded.

The Anglo-Saxon wave
The Norwegians have time to put up a shield wall but as the English pour across the bridge, brutal fighting wages. Ultimately, the shield wall falls and Tostig and Hardrada join the fallen.

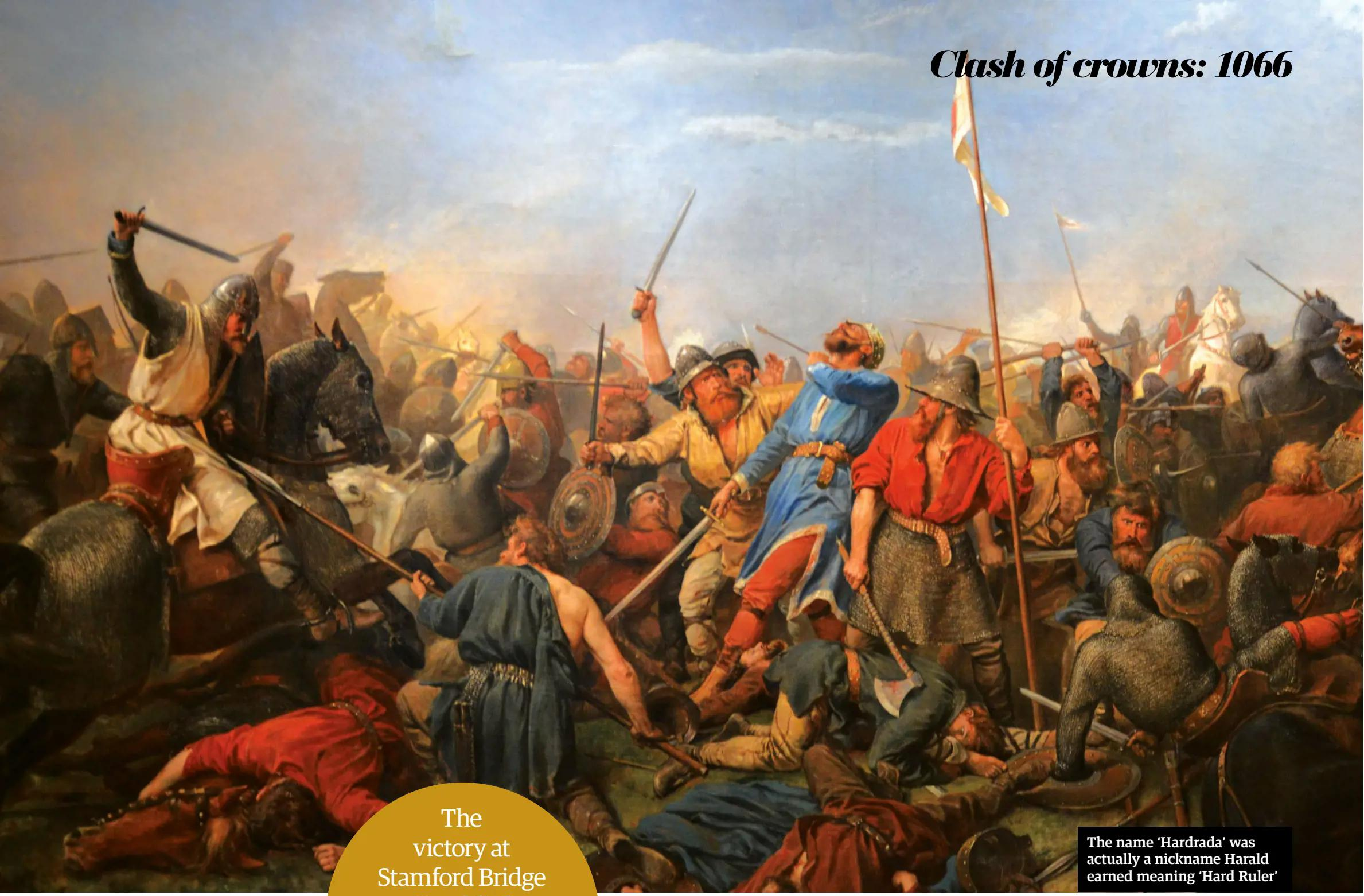
Delayed reinforcements
Norwegian reinforcements, led by Orre, arrive. They briefly cause considerable damage to the English flank, but the Anglo-Saxons regroup and defeat them. Survivors drown in the rivers as they rush to escape.

NORWEGIANS	SAXONS
COMMANDERS: Harald Hardrada, Tostig Godwinson	**COMMANDER:** Harold Godwinson
TROOPS: Approx 9,000, 3,000 of which arrived late	**TROOPS:** Approx 15,000, significantly more than the norwegian force
KEY UNIT: Axe-men	**KEY UNIT:** The professional housecarls
STRENGTHS: An almost impenetrable shield wall	**STRENGTHS:** The element of surprise
WEAKNESSES: Unprepared, many men were without armour	**WEAKNESSES:** Forced to cross the narrow choke-point of the bridge
CASUALTIES AND LOSSES: Approx 6,000	**CASUALTIES AND LOSSES:** Approx 5,000



the Nordics' lack of armour cost them dearly and the ranks began to fall. Hardrada –a giant of a man and the last Viking king – was slain by an arrow to his windpipe and Tostig too met his end in the land he had fought for his entire adult life. Even reinforcements led by Eystein Orre, who had rushed all the way from Riccall, were not enough to quash the Anglo-Saxon army. This force, known as Orre's storm, was so fatigued that it is said many collapsed and died of exhaustion as they reached the field. Although they were able to briefly hold back the defenders, they too fell victim to Harold's determination, and then they fled for their lives.

For Harold, Stamford Bridge was an epic victory and cemented his position as a strong



The name 'Hardrada' was actually a nickname Harald earned meaning 'Hard Ruler'

The victory at Stamford Bridge gave Harold's forces a morale boost, but ultimately sapped their strength for Hastings

and reliable English king. However, it would also forever be intrinsically linked to his downfall. Just three days after Harold's success, another would-be king landed on his shores. William had finally arrived.

Harold feared William for good reason; the Duke of Normandy had a fearsome reputation, and this was not all bravado. William had been born to his father's mistress, and his illegitimate status had plagued him throughout his life. Commonly referred to as 'The Bastard' by his enemies, William was a man who, from the age of seven or eight, had faced constant criticism and challenge because of who he was. Throughout his life he had to fight for everything he had. William had grown up in a land gripped by war and chaos, he had been jostled between ambitious nobles who wished to use him for power, and from his earliest years of rule he had to squash constant rebellions. In spite of this, through sheer determination and a clever marriage to Matilda of Flanders, William 'The Bastard' had managed to consolidate power in Normandy against all odds.

This whole experience had made the duke hard, tough and fiercely determined to succeed - there wasn't much in life that could hold William back, and Harold claiming the throne that was rightfully his was not something he could just stand by and accept. The two men were no strangers - William had saved Harold when he was held hostage and the two men proceeded to fight side by side. Harold was even recorded as having rescued two of William's soldiers from quicksand. Together the two defeated William's enemy, Conan II, and William thanked Harold for his services with a knighthood. If William's claim was true, and Harold did swear an oath to the duke, then it is easy to understand why this hot-blooded warrior was furious at Harold's betrayal. Once a friend, he was now an enemy, and William knew only one way to deal with enemies: war was in his blood, he was moulded by it.

William's timing was disastrous for Harold but hugely beneficial to himself. The duke had enough time to build a wooden castle at Hastings, raid the surrounding area and thoroughly prepare his force for the oncoming storm. Harold, meanwhile, was anything but prepared. The English king had left a great number of his forces in the north, and the men he did bring had to march south from London in approximately a week. By the time they reached Senlac Hill, near Hastings, they were absolutely exhausted.

Harold knew his surprise tactics would not work here, so he set up his army in a defensive position atop the hill. Each of his flanks was protected by marshy land that would make an enemy advance difficult. He positioned his strongest fighters, the housecarls, at the front of his shield wall. At 9am, the trumpets rang out and the Normans moved. The archers attacked first, sending arrows raining over the English men. However, Harold's position on the hill, and his soldiers' sturdy shields, prevented much damage.

A silver penny showing a contemporary, if rather faded, depiction of Harold Godwinson

William decided that if the archers couldn't do it then he would have to act quickly. He sent his army forward in three groups, with himself riding through the middle, the papal banner billowing above his head. The attackers rode hard, but they were still unable to break the Anglo-Saxon shield wall, and they retreated once more.

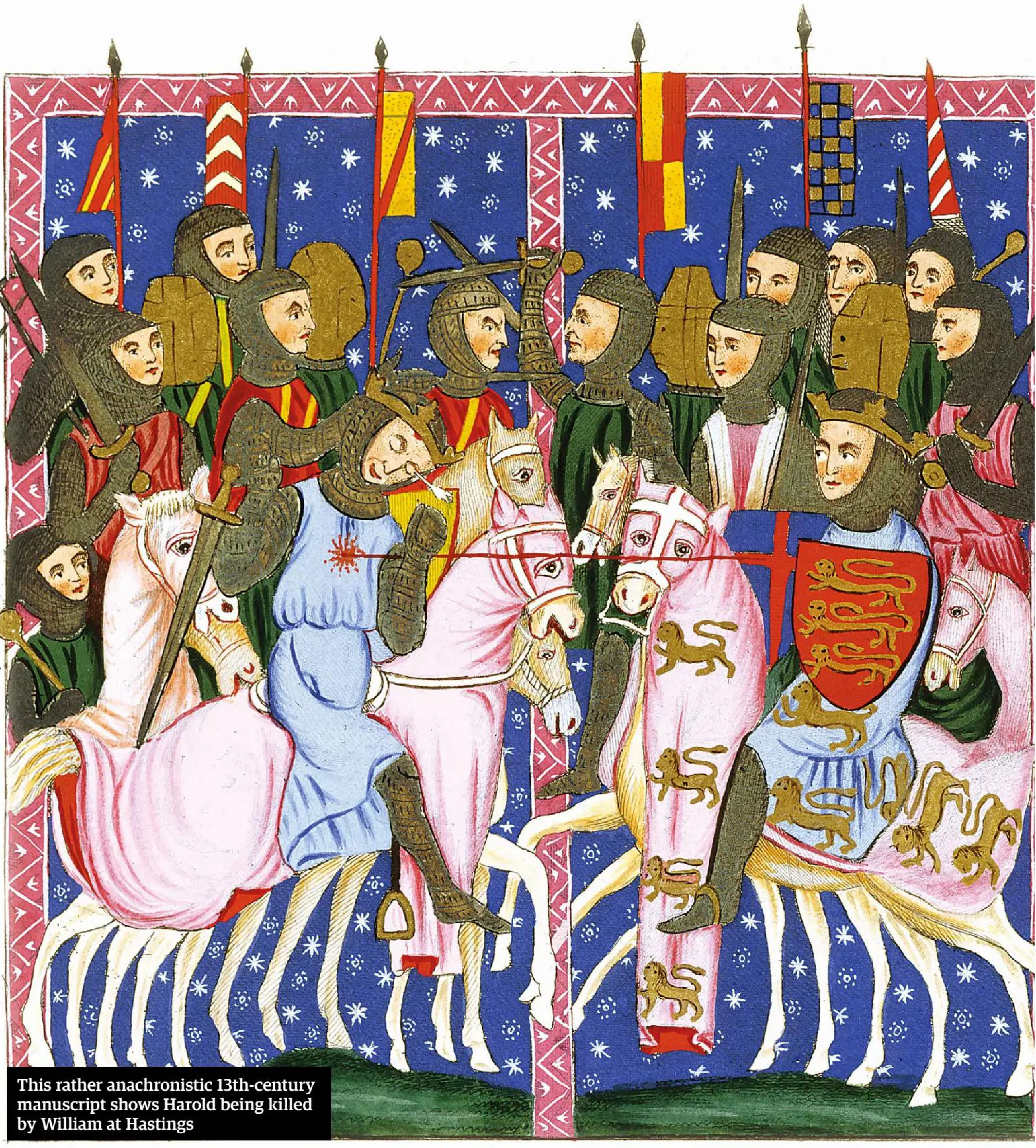
Harold's men, excited by what seemed like another victory, gave chase to the fleeing Normans. It was at this point that a rumour began to circulate that William had been killed. Sensing a lull in morale, the duke pushed back his helmet and rode among his men, commanding them to attack the English who had broken away from the hill. With a revitalised Norman force, the English were overwhelmed, and few who descended the hill survived.

At around midday, there was a lull in the battle, with both sides resting and replenishing their strength, it was then that William decided to change tactics. Witnessing the victory of the previous English pursuit, he decided to draw them out again. When the battle resumed, the Norman cavalry thundered forward into the shield wall. The fighting was brutal and desperate, with Harold's own brothers cut down in the melee, but still the shield wall held. As ordered, the Normans retreated and once more Harold's men pursued them down the hill. All at once William's soldiers turned and attacked the English.

The battle raged on until 4pm, and with the English numbers now depleted, the shield wall grew shorter and weaker. William saw his opportunity and sent his whole army up the hill, while the archers continued to shoot their arrows, and this time it worked. The shield wall finally broke and the Normans wreaked havoc, cutting down Harold's remaining housecarls and, at some point, the cursed king himself.

It is of some debate if Harold died as a result of an arrow to the eye or was felled with a sword, as the famous Bayeux Tapestry depicts both. What we do know is that his death had a tremendous effect on his men. Leaderless, the Anglo-Saxons began to flee the field into the woods behind. However, Harold's loyal soldiers of the royal household remained by his body and fought until the end.

Hastings was not an easy-won battle. William too lost a great number of his men, and bodies were still found on the hillside years later. When Harold's mother requested that William return her son's body to him, he refused, stating that Harold should be buried on the shore of the land he sought to guard. Still rumours persisted that Harold had not died at all, but instead had gone into hiding, to one day return and reclaim his land. The people's love for Harold was still strong, and although William may have won the battle, the war to truly become the ruler of England and its people was one that would wage for years to come. William's victory at Hastings was decisive, but it was not the final one: it would take further years of brutal subjugation, changing the land, its language and inhabitants, for the Normans to triumph in England.



This rather anachronistic 13th-century manuscript shows Harold being killed by William at Hastings

What If?

With the clash of three kings, England faced three fates

20 SEPTEMBER 1066

The Saxon earls triumph at Fulford
Harald Hardrada and Tostig are defeated at Fulford by the northern earls, Edwin and Morcar.

28 SEPTEMBER 1066

Godwinson's troops march south
Aware that William's ships are incoming, Godwinson marches his army south from London to meet them.

29 SEPTEMBER 1066

Saxons defeat the Normans
With a well-rested army, Harold is able to fight off William and the Norman invaders at Hastings; Harold is celebrated as a hero.

JANUARY 1066

William prepares for invasion
Believing himself the rightful heir, William gathers an army of noblemen and a fleet of 700 vessels.

SEPTEMBER 1066

Harald Hardrada's forces invade
Also believing the crown to be rightfully his, Norse king Harald Hardrada invades England, sailing up the Ouse to land in Yorkshire.

20 SEPTEMBER 1066

The Anglo-Saxons are defeated at Fulford
Harald is confronted by Harold's earls and they do battle at Fulford. The Saxons are outnumbered and the Norwegians claim York.

25 SEPTEMBER 1066

Anglo-Saxons triumph at Stamford Bridge
After marching his men North, Harold faces the invaders and defeats them at Stamford Bridge, killing Harald Hardrada.

14 OCTOBER 1066

Harold Godwinson defeated at Hastings
After William's fleet crosses the Channel, Harold faces them at the Battle of Hastings. But the English are tired and ultimately lose to the invaders.

25 DECEMBER 1066

William crowned king
William initially faces opposition but after capturing London he is finally crowned king. Rebellions would continue to rock the country for years after.

25 SEPTEMBER 1066

Nordic triumph at Stamford Bridge
Despite being ambushed by the Saxons, the Nordic forces triumph over Harold's men, and Harold himself is killed.

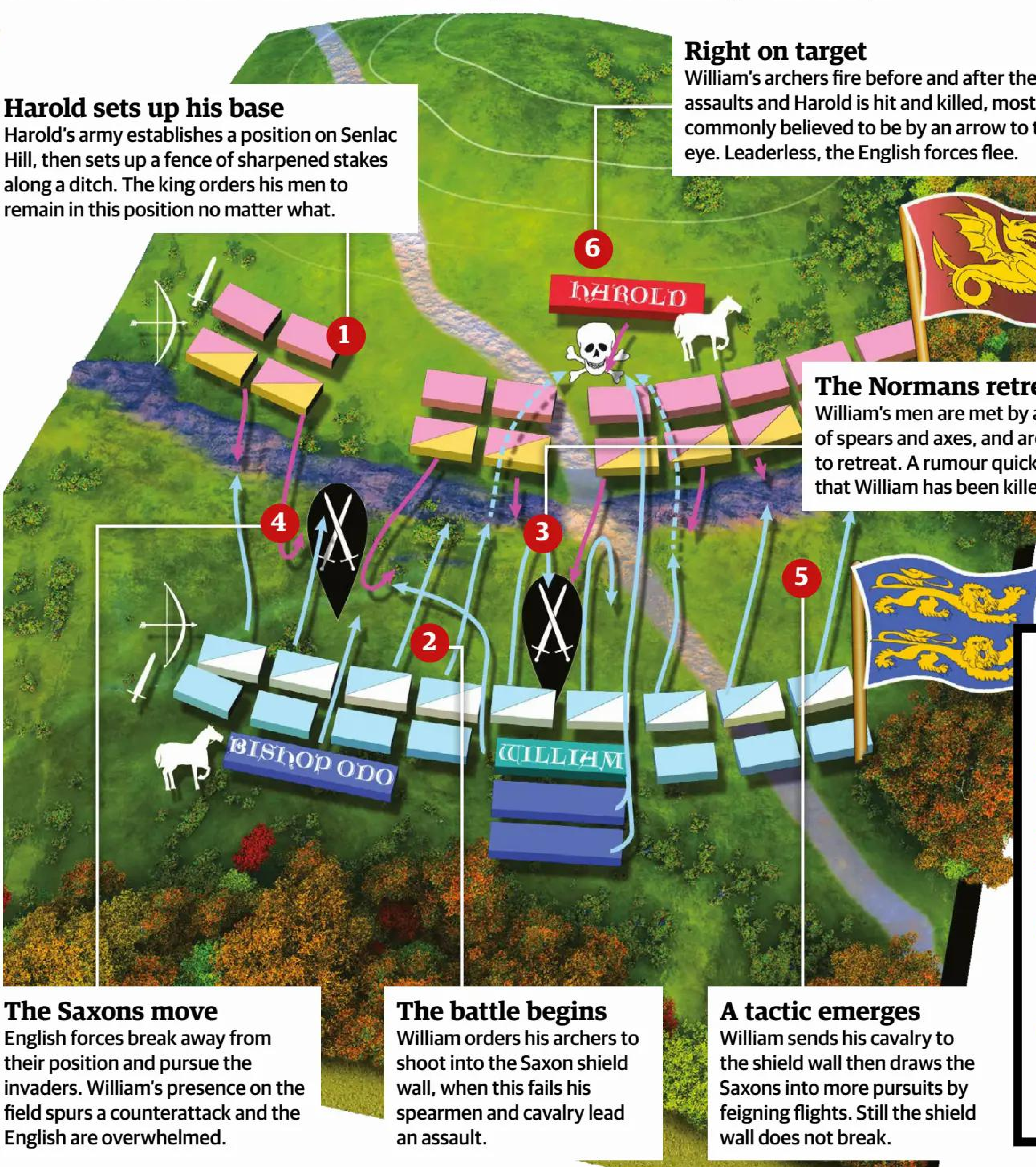
14 OCTOBER 1066

Nordics defeat Normans
Hardrada's forces are amply prepared to face William's, and after a brutal battle, the Norman would-be conqueror is defeated by the Norwegians.

KEY
- REAL TIMELINE
- KING HARDRADA TIMELINE
- KING GODWINSON TIMELINE

The Battle of Hastings

The pivotal clash that would forever alter the destiny of medieval England and cement 1066 as one of the most important dates in English history



Harold sets up his base

Harold's army establishes a position on Senlac Hill, then sets up a fence of sharpened stakes along a ditch. The king orders his men to remain in this position no matter what.

Right on target

William's archers fire before and after the assaults and Harold is hit and killed, most commonly believed to be by an arrow to the eye. Leaderless, the English forces flee.

The Normans retreat

William's men are met by a barrage of spears and axes, and are forced to retreat. A rumour quickly spreads that William has been killed.

The Saxons move

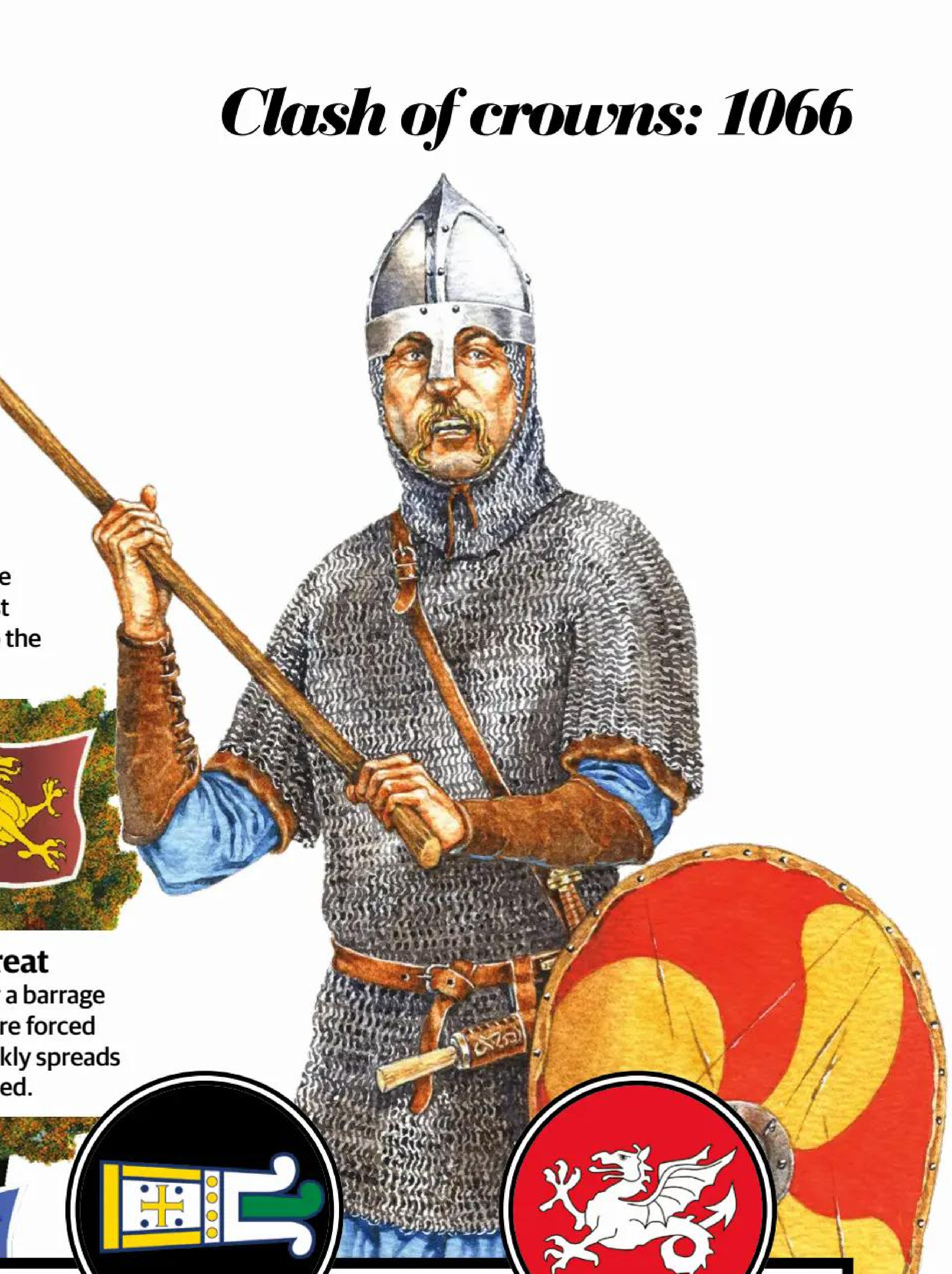
English forces break away from their position and pursue the invaders. William's presence on the field spurs a counterattack and the English are overwhelmed.

The battle begins

William orders his archers to shoot into the Saxon shield wall, when this fails his spearmen and cavalry lead an assault.

A tactic emerges

William sends his cavalry to the shield wall then draws the Saxons into more pursuits by feigning flights. Still the shield wall does not break.



	NORMANS	SAXONS
COMMANDER:	William of Normandy	Harold Godwinson
TROOPS:	Unknown, approx 7,000-12,000	Unknown, approx 5,000-13,000
KEY UNIT:	Norman cavalry	The king's bodyguards, or 'housecarls'
STRENGTHS:	An experienced leader and rested troops	The tremendously deadly battle-axes
WEAKNESSES:	Weak starting position: the English were positioned on the top of the hill with their flanks protected	Significant losses recently endured at the battle of Stamford Bridge, lack of cavalry
CASUALTIES AND LOSSES:	Unknown but the figures were heavy. However, not as high as the Saxon losses	Approx 50 per cent of the force

10 OCTOBER 1066

Normandy falls into disarray
Left leaderless, with a king in his infancy, Normandy descends into civil strife that will continue for two decades.

1068

A kingdom at peace
Through careful negotiation, Harold is able to contain the raids by the Celts and strike a deal with Wales and Scotland, leaving the island divided, but at peace.

1072

England grows strong
Harold exploits France, claiming many strategic ports without issue. He also forms strong bonds with Scandinavia, making him a powerful figure on the globe.

1200s

The Northern Empire expands
With its strong trade routes, the Northern Empire of Europe steadily expands. This trade network spans all the way from the Americas to the eastern Mediterranean.

1300s

Southern Europe falls
After many wars between the countries of southern Europe, the Northern Empire fully dominates Europe, with Scandinavian culture engulfing the Latin influences.

1069-70

William strikes back
In response to the Northern rebels, William carries out a series of bloody campaigns known as the Harrying of the North.

1080s

The Tower of London is built
In an effort to secure control over England, William orders the construction of many castles, the most famous being the White Tower of the Tower of London.

1085

The *Domesday Book* is created
To further secure the land holdings of himself and his vassals, William orders the creation of the *Domesday Book*.

9 SEPTEMBER 1087

Death of William
While on a military campaign, William falls ill and dies. His death begins a war between his two sons for control of his kingdoms of England and Normandy.

1135-54

Civil war reigns supreme
After the death of William's fourth son, Henry I, a succession crisis sparks a brutal civil war known as the Anarchy.

21 NOVEMBER 1066

Hardrada is crowned
In a country that has previously been ruled by Scandinavian kings, Hardrada is able to persuade any would-be rebels to accept his rule.

1080s

England gets Norse
Nordic influences take hold of England: the language becomes heavily Nordic, and the battle-axe becomes the primary weapon of choice.

1110

Norway grows strong
With Norway growing stronger, it faces its enemy France in a bloody war that wages for years. Finally the Nordic forces claim victory and the spoils are divided.

1200

The Nordic Empire expands
The Nordic Empire becomes one of the most formidable in Europe; this powerful axis crushes the influence of the Catholic Church and its associated nations.

1390

America is found
Due to the strong British/Norse partnership, the Nordics land in America, claiming the land long before their Spanish rivals. The country is quickly developed.

The storm rises

Harold was now king. But he knew he would have to fight to keep the throne. As the tense weeks of 1066 passed, Harold and his rival claimants made ready. The storm was coming

Harold, England's most powerful man, had made himself king. But as Ealdred, Archbishop of York, placed the crown upon his head, Harold knew he was going to have to fight to keep the throne.

There were no fixed rules of succession in 11th century England. The new king should, ideally, be a blood relative of the dead ruler. But the examples of Sweyn Forkbeard and, especially, Cnut had shown that might trumped claims of blood. And the only available blood relative to Edward was the young – no more than 13 – Edgar Ætheling, the grandson of Edmund Ironside. 'Ætheling' is an Old English title meaning someone who is throneworthy: Edgar was a suitable candidate for the throne.

At the time it was claimed that Edward the Confessor had decided to be celibate, thus leaving no direct heir to the throne

But the crown did not rest upon blood alone. The reigning king might nominate his successor, and the sources indicate that Edward, on his death bed, did give his blessing to Harold as the man to succeed him. Unfortunately, Edward had also made such a promise to William, Duke of Normandy, and probably to Edgar Ætheling's father too – and thus to Edgar himself.

Finally, there was the choice of the magnates of England, the most powerful men in the land. A king could not rule without their assent and, in choosing the new king, theirs were the most powerful voices. Assembled as they were, there can be no doubt that England's magnates chose Harold as king; a choice made easier by the fact that Harold had cemented an alliance with the new earls of Northumbria and Mercia, Morcar and Eadwine, by marrying their sister, Ealdgyth.

The cast had assembled. It remained for the fatal drama to be played to its end.

A duke scorned

Brooding on the promise he'd received from Edward, William, the bastard duke of Normandy, planned his revenge

William was engaging in his favourite pastime, hunting, when the messenger reached him: Harold had been proclaimed king of England. The duke returned to Rouen in silent anger.

William believed that Edward had promised him the throne. What's more, when Harold had stayed with him two years before, he had given the duke an oath that he would support William's claim to the throne. That the throne might not be in Edward's power to give, or that Harold had been in no position to refuse such an oath, seems not to have entered William's mind. But brooding in his duchy, William realised that if he would have would he believed was his right, then he would have to fight for it.

At least his duchy was secure. William's two great enemies, King Henri and Count Geoffrey, were both dead. There were no threats on the southern side of the sea. But to launch such an invasion was to risk everything, life included, that he had built up over the previous thirty years. Early medieval warlords generally avoided pitched, set-piece battles. The normal round of warfare was sieges and devastation: investing strongpoints and demonstrating the incapacity of the local lord to protect his population. Battles were inherently risky affairs, with uncertain outcomes. How much more would this be a case for William, fighting in a strange land without the benefit of local knowledge or local support. Only the uttermost conviction of his cause can have swayed him to attempt such an enterprise.

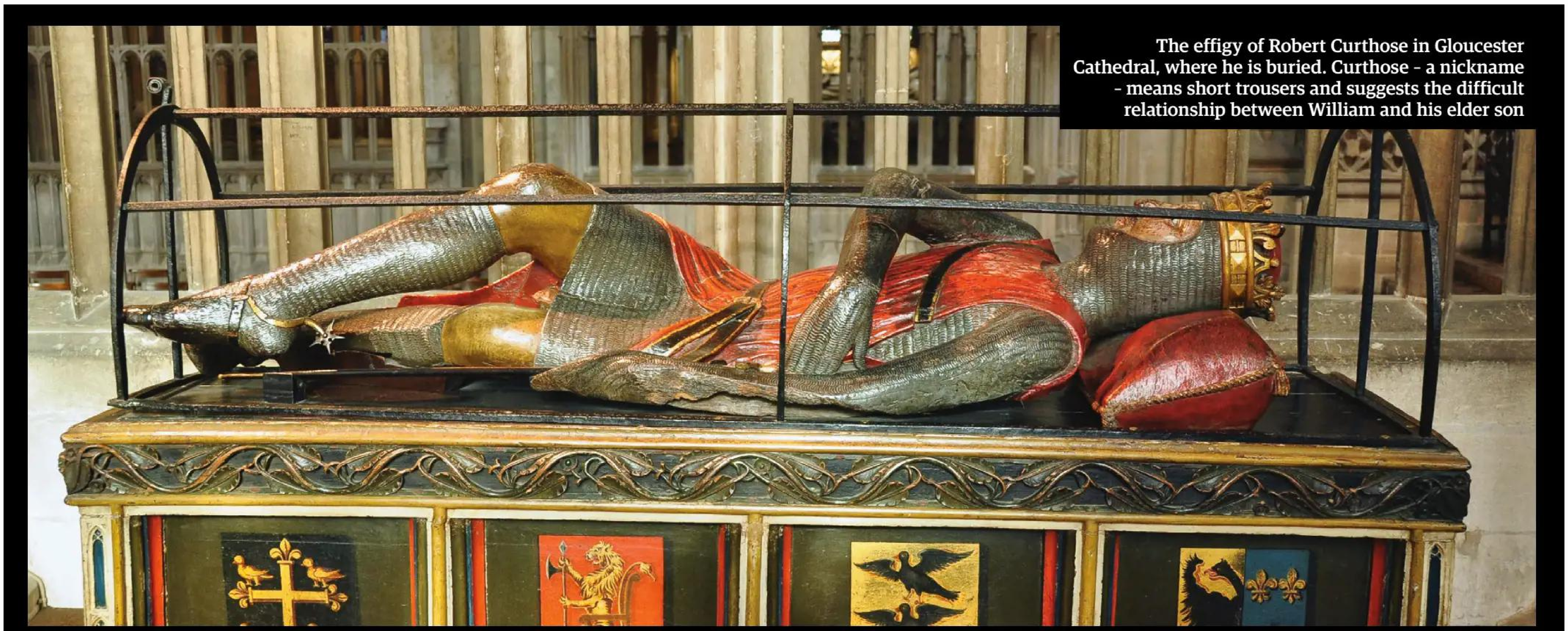
Although descendants of Vikings, the Normans were nervous sailors who were afraid of the sea

But it was one thing for William to believe he had right on his side. What of his magnates, the men who would risk everything alongside him. First William called together his closest allies, including his half-brothers, Odo and Robert, and put the proposed invasion to them. They agreed, but told William to put his plan before a larger gathering of Norman lords.

This second council was less enthusiastic about the enterprise. These more cautious lords pointed out the strength of the kingdom they were attacking and the perils of a sea-borne invasion. All these objections were true, yet William somehow won their backing, whether through the strength of his case or by the promise of the riches that would be theirs should they succeed in conquering England – a famously wealthy land – we don't know, although both belief and avarice no doubt played their part.

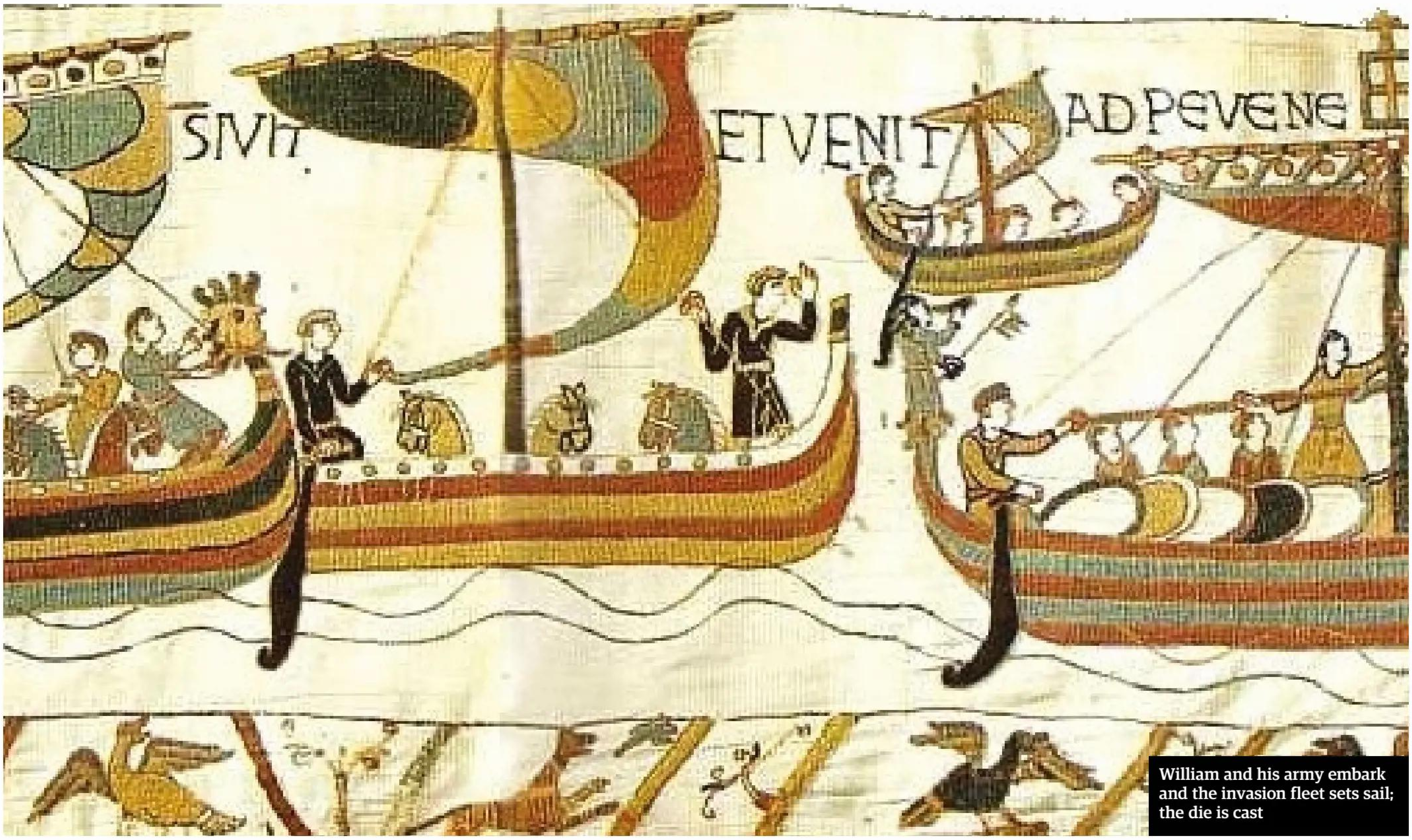
But it was one thing to agree an invasion, another to muster the logistics to mount one. The first requirement were ships, lots of ships. Robert and Odo promised 120 and 100 respectively. The lesser lords followed suit with smaller numbers of vessels. Some would already have been owned by Norman lords, others were bought or hired, but the forests of Normandy must have been filled with the sound of axes and the smell of sawdust through the spring of 1066.

William made spiritual as well as material preparations, including dedicating a new abbey, Holy Trinity in Caen, and promising land across the Channel to his abbey at Fécamp should he have land to give. Many of his nobles did likewise. The invaders depended upon a moral and spiritual belief that God was on their side for, by mounting their attack, they were putting their cause under God's judgement: in effect, this was trial by combat,


The effigy of Robert Curthose in Gloucester Cathedral, where he is buried. Curthose – a nickname – means short trousers and suggests the difficult relationship between William and his elder son

Taking care of business

Although William had made every effort to convince his magnates, his people and the wider world of Christendom of the justice of his case, yet the duke was old and wise enough to know that war was war, and even a war fought under God's banner might turn against his hopes. So, as part of his preparations, William nominated his eldest son, Robert Curthose, to succeed him as Duke of Normandy in the event of his death, and saw that Robert also signed William's gifts to his new abbey. Amid their other preparations, the Norman magnates spent much time setting their affairs in order. Everyone involved knew they were embarking on a do-or-die enterprise, and most of them sought to ensure they had settled outstanding disputes and matters of inheritance before they left.



William and his army embark and the invasion fleet sets sail; the die is cast

“Finally, on 27 September, the wind swung in William’s favour and the army embarked and the boats set sail”

but one where the combatants were armies rather than individuals.

However, William did not neglect his material preparations either. One estimate - and it’s not much more than that - is that the Normans had assembled an invasion fleet of some 700 vessels by the end of June. The fleet matched William’s army. Again, we can do little better than estimate, but 7,000 is generally regarded as a reasonable guess as to the number of men under his command. Of these, many were Norman lords and their men, but a large contingent was composed of mercenaries: William bought up the best fighting men his money could secure.

Men and boats were ready by August. And then, they waited. For a month. Contemporary chroniclers are clear as to the reason for the delay: the wind. The weather had settled and for day after day it blew in defence of England. Across the Channel, Harold waited, but no fleet of sails filled the horizon. From William’s base at Dives-sur-Mer, the coast of England was a long way off (to Hastings, it’s over a hundred miles). And while the winds blew, William had to keep his men - and their horses - supplied with food and drink, while arranging for the disposal of the products of all that eating and drinking. It was a colossal undertaking - 30,000 gallons of water and 30 tons of food a day, not to mention the lakes of urine and mountains of excrement - but William and his stewards kept his army together while he waited for the weather to change.

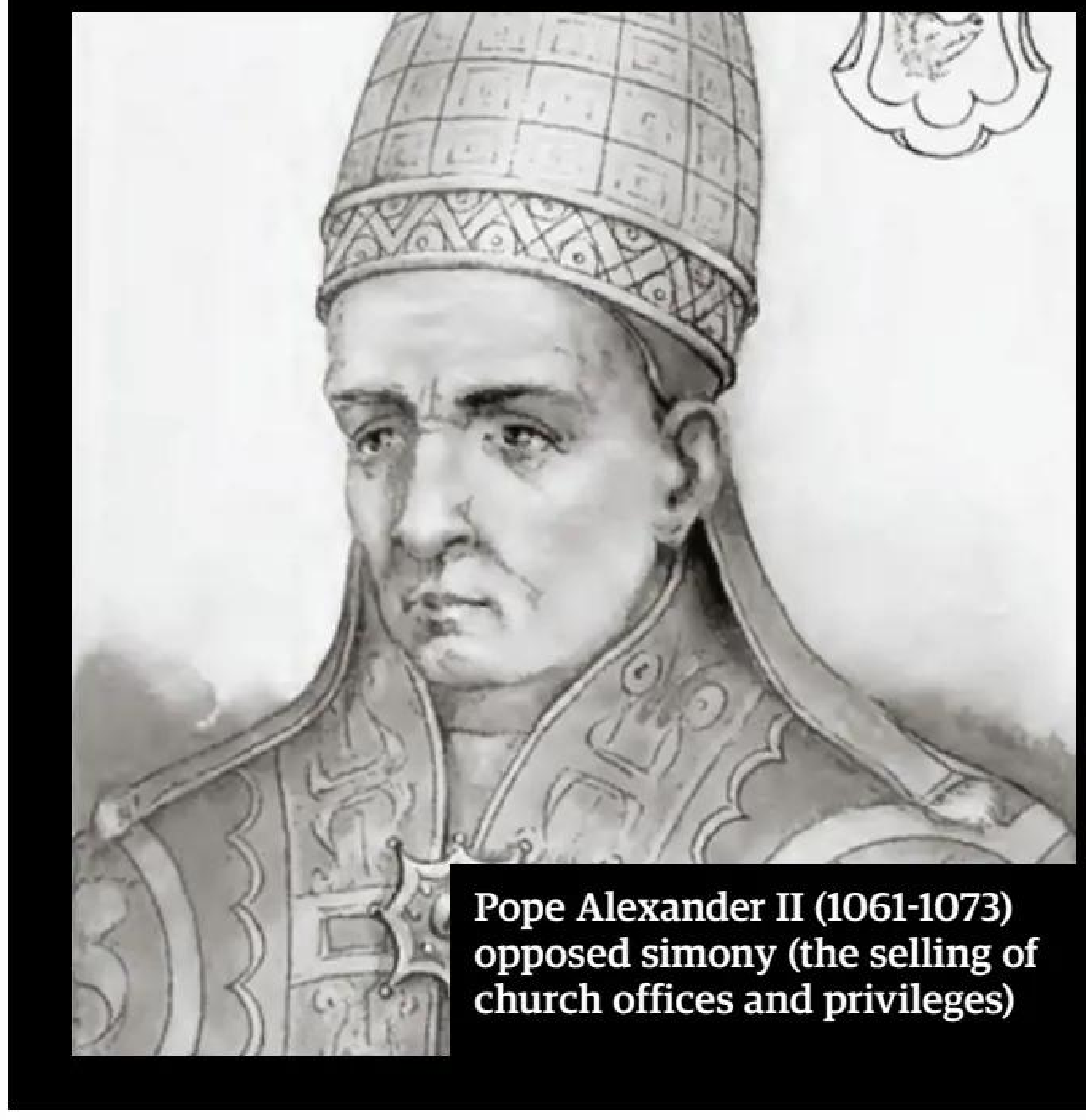
Finally, on 27 September, the wind swung in William’s favour and the army embarked and the boats set sail. The invasion had begun.

But this was the third invasion of the year. Although William probably did not know it, Harold had already beaten off two attempts on his crown. The King of England must have been confident he could beat a third.

The Norman lords who followed William had the terms of their agreement with the duke written down, to ensure their reward

God on our side

Soon after he heard that Harold had been crowned king, William sent an embassy to Pope Alexander II in Rome, asking papal support for his projected invasion of England. Although the text has not survived, the case William made must have been persuasive: it no doubt rehearsed the familiar points of Edward’s promise of the throne and Harold’s perjury in swearing on holy relics to support William’s claim to the crown, and the pope soon decided in William’s favour. As a mark of his support, Pope Alexander sent a banner with William’s returning messengers and the instruction that England’s clergy should submit to William as king. For William, this was further proof that God was, indeed, on his side.



Pope Alexander II (1061-1073) opposed simony (the selling of church offices and privileges)

Brothers in arms

The dispossession and exile of Tostig Godwinson, Harold's younger brother, would have fatal consequences for England's first family

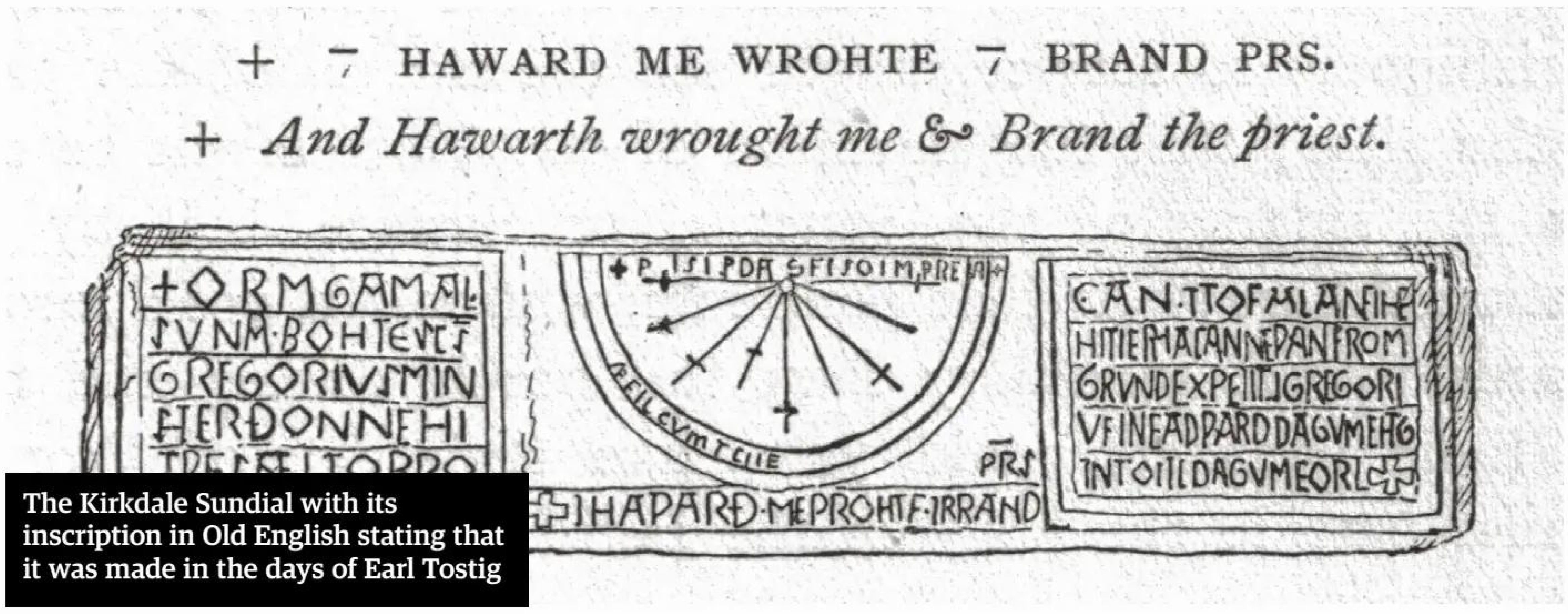
Tostig was the third son of Earl Godwin. With the exile and death in 1052 of the eldest brother, Sweyn, Tostig became the second most important member of the Godwinson family, his status underlined by his being given the earldom of Northumbria. In the 11th century, the territory ruled by the earl of Northumbria really did stretch from the Humber to the border with Scotland, making Tostig one of the most powerful men in the country. With Tostig ruling Northumbria from 1055, Harold Earl of Wessex, Gyrth Earl of East Anglia and Leofwine Earl of Kent, the brothers effectively commanded most of the country.

Such power bred resentment, a resentment that broke out against Tostig in 1065 when some of the men of his earldom launched an open revolt against his rule, claiming it was overly harsh and against their ancient laws – it is possible that Tostig had imposed the laws of Wessex upon a people who had been ruled by the legal code of King Cnut and expected that to continue.

With Tostig attending King Edward and far to the south of his earldom, the rebels attacked Tostig's palace in York, killing anyone who could not make good his escape – one chronicler claimed that 200 men were killed. The rebels' aim was to install Morcar, son of the late earl of Northumbria, as earl in place of Tostig and to this end they marched south, killing Tostig's men wherever they found them, until they reached Northampton, where Tostig's brother, Harold, was waiting for them. But Harold was just there to negotiate and, taking note of the rebels' demands, Harold went to convey them to the king. Edward, for whom Tostig was a particular favourite, was all for destroying the rebels by force of arms, but Harold would not countenance force. Faced with his brother's abandonment, Tostig publicly accused Harold of plotting with the rebels to replace him, but Harold proved his innocence, at least to the satisfaction of his contemporaries, by making a public oath of exculpation.

Harold's swift crowning shows he knew what lay ahead – an English king had never been crowned so soon after being accepted

"He sailed to Norway to meet its king, the famed, and famously fearsome, Harald Hardrada"


+ ⁊ HAWARD ME WROHTE ⁊ BRAND PRS.
+ And Hawarth wrought me & Brand the priest.

The Kirkdale Sundial with its inscription in Old English stating that it was made in the days of Earl Tostig

One chronicler dates the breakdown in the relationship between the brothers to an earlier campaign, after which Tostig had grown jealous of Harold and, arriving at a banquet that Harold was preparing for King Edward, Tostig killed Harold's some of Harold's servants, dismembered them and had them served up as part of the feast.

The more likely reason was the cold calculation on Harold's part that civil war was a price too high to pay for his brother's earldom. With his eyes now firmly on the crown, Harold threw his brother under the hooves of the rebellion and, to seal the deal, married the sister of Morcar, the new earl of Northumbria.

Faced with such a situation, Tostig had little choice but to go into exile early in November 1065. Taking his wife, children and his most faithful retainers, Tostig sailed across to Flanders, receiving a welcome there from his father-in-law. But Tostig was not about to settle into a quiet exile. Although his movements are hard to reconstruct, Tostig seems to have set about meeting with the kings and dukes most able to lend him the men and material necessary for him to regain his place at England's high table: he may even have met William. William, though, had other plans. Heading east, Tostig first tried to persuade the King of Denmark to help him but, when that failed, he sailed to Norway to meet its king, the famed, and famously fearsome, Harald Hardrada.

Harald was around fifty when Tostig came calling – old for a warrior king. At first, he was none too keen on helping Tostig. But Tostig deployed all the Godwinson wit and charm, first flattering

Timeline

1009

The patriarch in exile
Wulfnoth, grandfather of Harold and Tostig, fled into exile when he was accused of treachery by the brother of King Æthelred's counselor, Eadric Streona. But Wulfnoth did not go quietly: he commandeered 20 of the king's ships and struck back, while the pursuing ships foundered in a storm.

1022/3

A new son
Harold, the second son of Godwin, earl of Wessex, and his wife, Gytha Thorkelsdóttir, a Danish noblewoman, is born. An older brother, Sweyn, was born a couple of years earlier.

1037

The kingmaker
Earl Godwin, the most powerful nobleman in England, is instrumental in seeing Harold Harefoot raised to the throne. When Harold dies in 1040, Godwin is again kingmaker as Harthacnut is crowned.

1051

Downfall
King Edward moves against the Godwins and, after a tense confrontation, the family is forced into exile while Queen Edith is placed into a nunnery.

1052

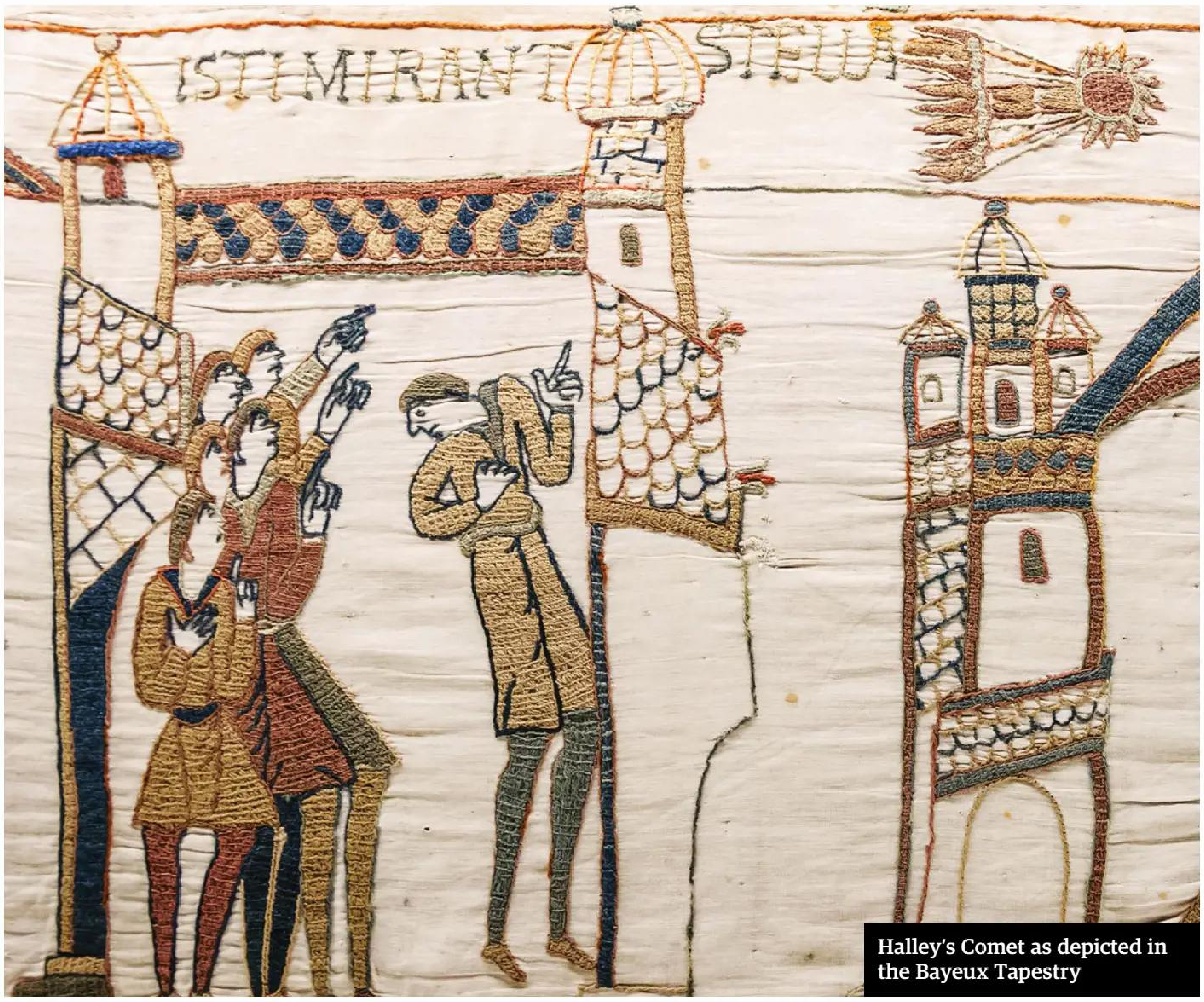
The Godwins return
The Godwins return to England at the head of a large fleet. This time, it is the king's support that melts away and Edward is forced to give the Godwins back their earldoms and to let the queen out of the nunnery.

Harald with the tale of the spread of his fame, then promising him that any invasion would be met with open arms on account of Tostig's popularity with the people and nobility of England. Harald fell for it - but perhaps the old warrior was looking for the chance for one final, and greatest, grab for glory.

The dedication of Edward's new abbey, Westminster, at the end of 1065 had attracted England's leading men to London

We don't know what arrangements the two men made, for the next we learn of Tostig, he was back in English waters, at the end of April, at the head of a fleet of ships. Perhaps Tostig was trying to replicate the strategy employed by his father, when he forced his way back from exile. So, after raiding the Isle of Wight, Tostig sailed east along the Channel, heading for the Isle of Thanet - which was still an island then - and a natural and oft-used stopping point for invaders and raiders. But Harold, with his army, set off to confront Tostig. Having failed in raising the people in his support, Tostig avoided battle and sailed north up the coast, into the Humber, the border of his old earldom, raiding some more. But there, the new earl, Morcar, drove Tostig back to his boats. His fleet now much reduced - from sixty to twelve boats - Tostig had little choice but to sail on north and make harbour with his old friend, King Malcolm of Scotland. There, Tostig waited. He waited because he was expecting someone to arrive at the head of a much greater fleet. He must have known that Harold, with his eyes turned to Normandy, was certainly not expecting an invasion in the north.

At the beginning of September Harald Hardrada arrived, and with him some 200 ships. The last Viking had arrived on English shores to grab glory and claim the crown.

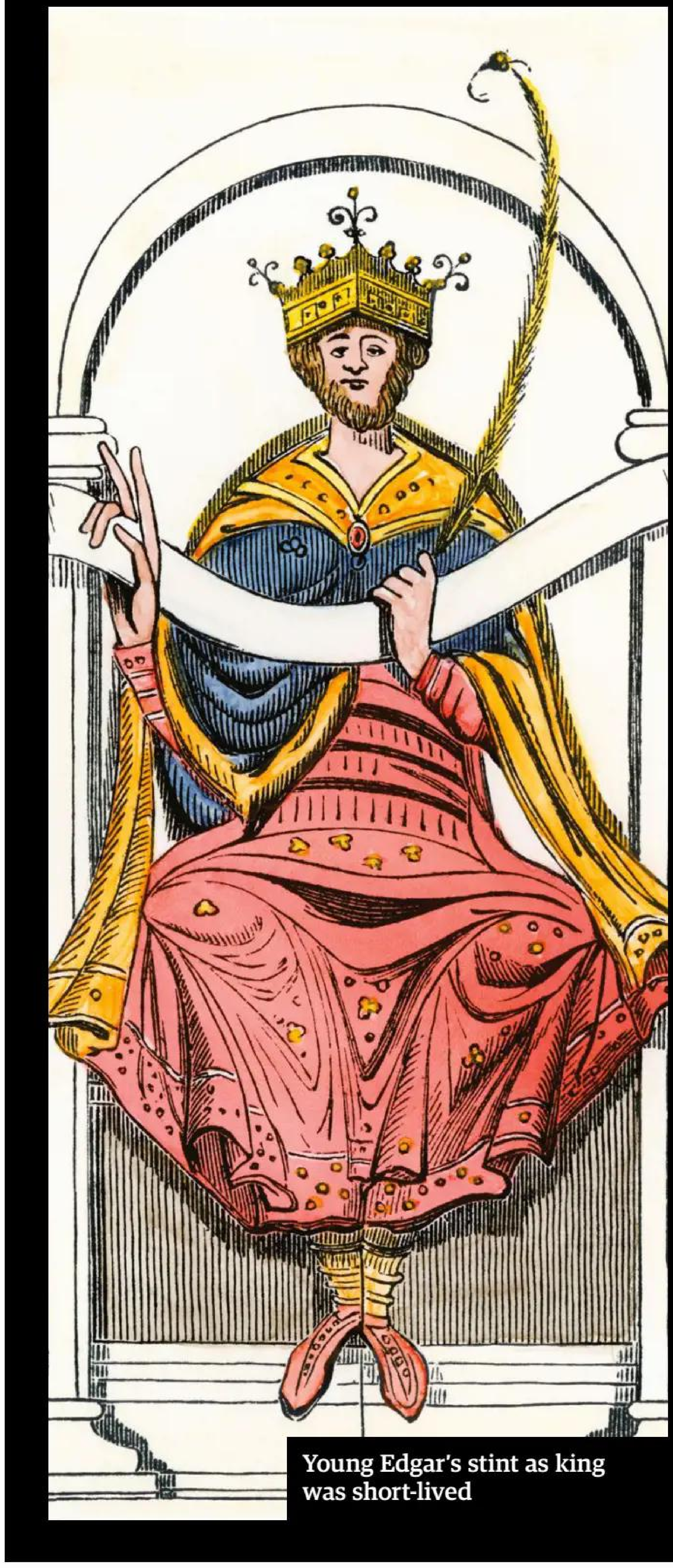


Halley's Comet as depicted in the Bayeux Tapestry

The boy who might have been king

The blood relative

Edgar Ætheling was the grandson of Edmund Ironside and thus he had, indisputably, the greatest claim to the crown when Edward died. But he was still young, 13 or so, and without a power base or powerful supporters in England. Only after Harold died would Edgar be installed as king, for a short time.



Young Edgar's stint as king was short-lived

1053

The kingmaker is dead
Earl Godwin, the dominant force in England, dies, probably of a stroke. But Harold inherits his earldom of Wessex, and takes his place as the power behind the throne.

1055

King in the north
Tostig is installed as earl of Northumbria and effective ruler of the lands in the north of England. The Godwin brothers now control most of the country.

1062-1063

Brothers in arms
Harold and Tostig both lead armies against Gruffydd ap Llywelyn, the king of Wales. Gruffydd flees to Snowdonia, where his men turn against him and kill him. Gruffydd's head and the figurehead of his ship are delivered to Harold.

1064

Mission to Normandy
Harold crosses the Channel, likely to visit William and buy the freedom of his brother, Wulfnoth, who had been held hostage since 1051. Harold fails, but is (supposedly) forced to swear an oath to support William's claim to the throne.

1065

Brothers at war
Harold does not support Tostig when rebellion breaks out in Northumbria. Tostig is forced into exile and Harold marries the sister of Morcar, the new earl of Northumbria.

Spearmen at the ready

Their classic weapons held high, the spearmen of Harald Hardrada and Tostig await the signal to engage the Northumbrian forces at Fulford. A common battlefield tactic during the period involved a 'shield wall' that provided mutual protection for troops overlapping shields and extending weapons forward.

Decisive swordplay

Swords rise and fall as the opposing lines clash during the Battle of Fulford on 20 September 1066. Although they had formerly opposed King Harold, the Northumbrian Earls Edwin and Morcar were the first to assemble forces to defend against the invasion of England in Yorkshire.

Northumbrian march

King Harald Hardrada of Norway, probably shown on horseback in this 13th century artist's rendering, and his ally the exiled Tostig, brother of Anglo-Saxon King Harold of England, plundered villages along the Northumbrian coast and engaged the combined forces of Earls Edwin and Morcar at Fulford in the autumn of 1066.

Hardy horses

At the time of the Battle of Fulford, horse cavalry had become standard among many armies of continental Europe; however, in England the horse was primarily utilised for transportation of supplies to and from the battlefield. Therefore, the presence of horses in this image may be somewhat misleading.

Northumbrian retreat
As the weight of the combined armies of Harald Hardrada and Tostig gains headway, Northumbrian infantrymen appear to be turning their backs in retreat from the field at Fulford. The battle ended in a victory for the invaders, an alarming development for Anglo-Saxon King Harold to the south.

Striking a blow
At Fulford, Harald Hardrada, king of Norway, strikes a Northumbrian infantryman with a heavy battle axe. Sometimes fashioned specifically for horsemen, the battle axe was a common weapon during the period. The typical battle axe consisted of a long wooden shaft and sharply edged head of carbon steel.

Battle of Fulford

FULFORD, EAST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE

20 SEPTEMBER 1066

The death of King Edward the Confessor in January 1066 left England and much of Western Europe in complete turmoil as competing claims to the English throne spawned armed conflict. On the day of Edward's funeral, Harold, Earl of Wessex, rushed to London and claimed the crown, fully aware that his ascension would require defence against his exiled brother Tostig, in league with Norwegian King Harald Hardrada (also known as King Harald III), and the threat of invasion by forces under William, Duke of Normandy.

As Harold awaited the Norman assault in the south, the Norse, or Viking, army of Hardrada landed near the mouth of the River Tyne, joining with Tostig's force to eventually number 10,000. Moving on to establish a base at Riccall, the invaders then marched on the city of York, encountering a defending army of Northumbrians and Mercians led by the Earls Edwin and Morcar, at Fulford on the outskirts of the city on September 20, 1066.

Edwin and Morcar deployed their soldiers with particular attention to the security of their flanks. To the left was a marshy area called the Fordland. To the right was the winding River Ouse. Harald chose to occupy higher ground along with opposing positions near the riverbank and the marsh. He observed that sufficient gains against either of the Northumbrian flanks would place the other in peril with avenues of retreat being impeded by the swampland or the river.

Harald wisely allowed the Northumbrians to attack and held strong reserves near the riverbank behind his front line. The initial Northumbrian assault gained ground, pushing Harald's troops back into the Fordland; however, the Norwegian king waited to commit the bulk of his reserves until his enemy had taken casualties and its spirited surge had lost momentum. On Harald's order, the Norse left wing assaulted the fatigued Northumbrians, effectively trapping them against the river and a sizable ditch that he had paralleled during his advance to the field at Fulford.

The tables were quickly turned, and the Northumbrians along the riverbank were separated from the remainder of their force by the swampy ground of the Fordland. The fighting wore on for several hours as some Northumbrian soldiers fled the field while others tried to stand fast and were killed or wounded in great numbers. Meanwhile, additional Norwegian troops joined the fight, assailing the beleaguered Northumbrians from a third direction.

Both sides suffered high casualties in the Battle of Fulford, the Northumbrians losing 900 men and the Norse army approximately 750. After resistance crumbled, Harald and Tostig accepted the surrender of York, choosing not to enter and subject the city to looting and vandalism. Hostages were gathered, and the Norse army moved on to Stamford Bridge to regroup after the battle.

When news of the landings to his north reached Harold, probably before the Battle of Fulford was fought, he set his army in motion despite the risk that the Normans might come ashore in the south. Apparently unaware that Harold was on the march, Harald and Tostig remained at Stamford Bridge. Although it ended in defeat, the fight at Fulford bought Harold precious time, and within days he was to make the most of it.

Norse Army

TROOPS 10,000
SHIPS 300

HARALD HARDRADA (KING HARALD III)

LEADER

The king of Norway, Harald spent years in exile and unsuccessfully attempted to claim the thrones of both Denmark and England.

Strengths Harald was loyal to his brother Olaf and assisted in his return to Norway.

Weakness Harald was ambitious and overextended himself in reaching for additional crowns.

VETERAN SOLDIERS

KEY UNIT

The experienced soldiers under Harald Hardrada turned the tide during the Battle of Fulford, executing the decisive flank attack.

Strengths Their invaluable combat experience contributed to the rout of the Northumbrians.

Weakness Lack of mobility sometimes prevented exploitation of a battlefield victory.

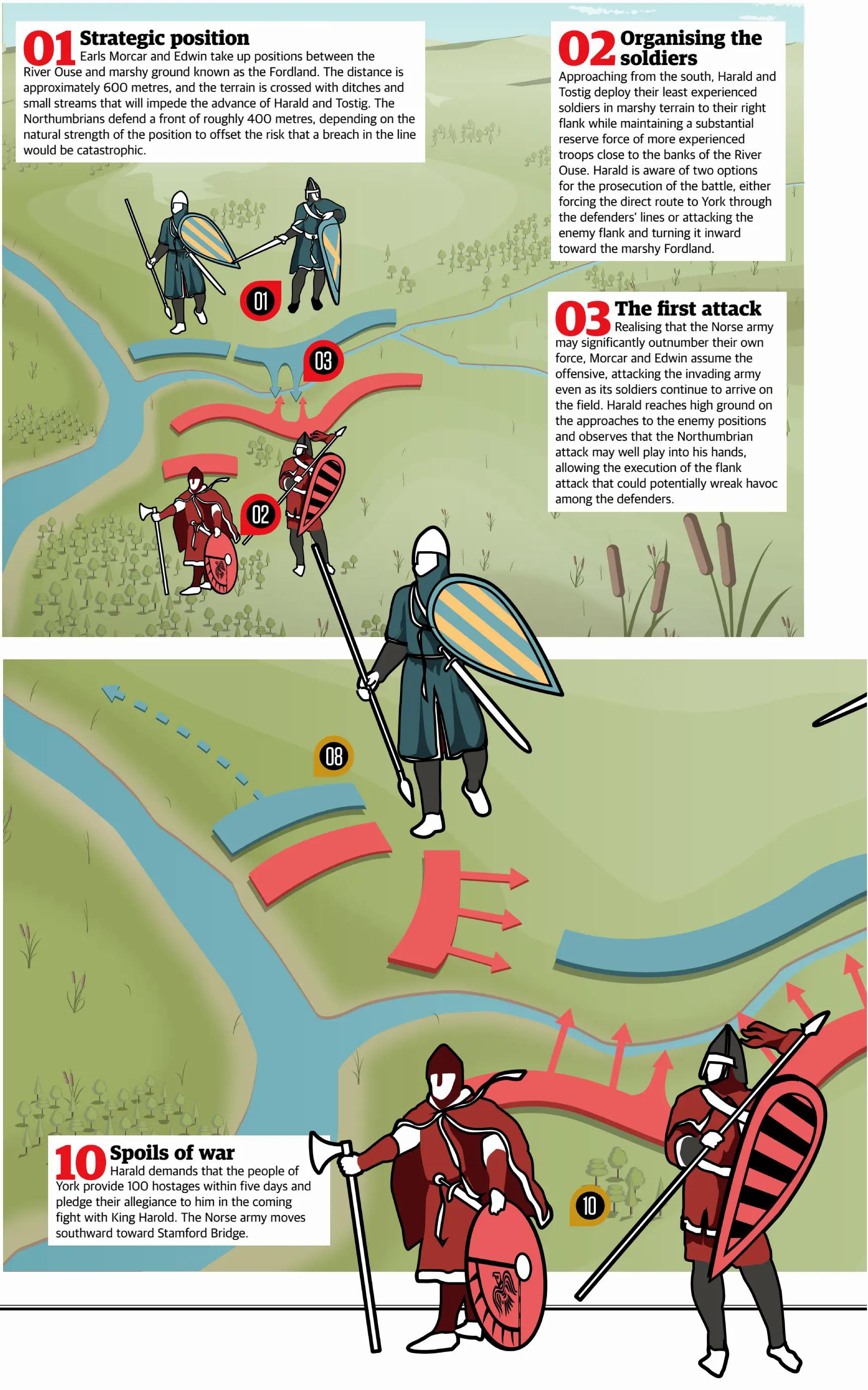
SPEAR

KEY WEAPON

The most common weapon of the Norse army was the spear, with a two-metre shaft and tip of iron.

Strengths The spear was an ideal weapon for inexperienced or lesser-trained infantry.

Weakness The spear was limited to thrusting or one throw in combat.



01 Strategic position

Earls Morcar and Edwin take up positions between the River Ouse and marshy ground known as the Fordland. The distance is approximately 600 metres, and the terrain is crossed with ditches and small streams that will impede the advance of Harald and Tostig. The Northumbrians defend a front of roughly 400 metres, depending on the natural strength of the position to offset the risk that a breach in the line would be catastrophic.

02 Organising the soldiers

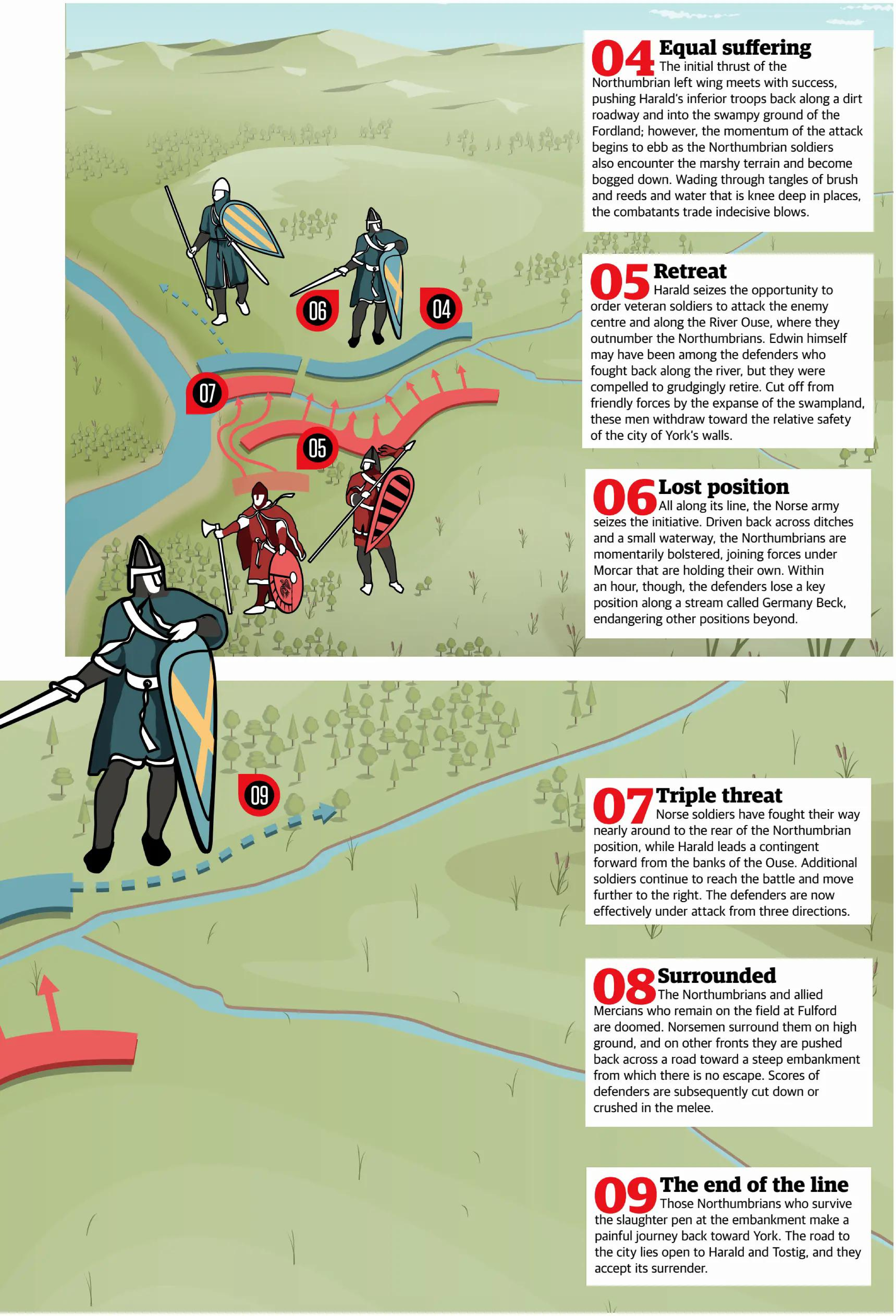
Approaching from the south, Harald and Tostig deploy their least experienced soldiers in marshy terrain to their right flank while maintaining a substantial reserve force of more experienced troops close to the banks of the River Ouse. Harald is aware of two options for the prosecution of the battle, either forcing the direct route to York through the defenders' lines or attacking the enemy flank and turning it inward toward the marshy Fordland.

03 The first attack

Realising that the Norse army may significantly outnumber their own force, Morcar and Edwin assume the offensive, attacking the invading army even as its soldiers continue to arrive on the field. Harald reaches high ground on the approaches to the enemy positions and observes that the Northumbrian attack may well play into his hands, allowing the execution of the flank attack that could potentially wreak havoc among the defenders.

10 Spoils of war

Harald demands that the people of York provide 100 hostages within five days and pledge their allegiance to him in the coming fight with King Harold. The Norse army moves southward toward Stamford Bridge.



04 Equal suffering

The initial thrust of the Northumbrian left wing meets with success, pushing Harald's inferior troops back along a dirt roadway and into the swampy ground of the Fordland; however, the momentum of the attack begins to ebb as the Northumbrian soldiers also encounter the marshy terrain and become bogged down. Wading through tangles of brush and reeds and water that is knee deep in places, the combatants trade indecisive blows.

05 Retreat

Harald seizes the opportunity to order veteran soldiers to attack the enemy centre and along the River Ouse, where they outnumber the Northumbrians. Edwin himself may have been among the defenders who fought back along the river, but they were compelled to grudgingly retire. Cut off from friendly forces by the expanse of the swampland, these men withdraw toward the relative safety of the city of York's walls.

06 Lost position

All along its line, the Norse army seizes the initiative. Driven back across ditches and a small waterway, the Northumbrians are momentarily bolstered, joining forces under Morcar that are holding their own. Within an hour, though, the defenders lose a key position along a stream called Germany Beck, endangering other positions beyond.

07 Triple threat

Norse soldiers have fought their way nearly around to the rear of the Northumbrian position, while Harald leads a contingent forward from the banks of the Ouse. Additional soldiers continue to reach the battle and move further to the right. The defenders are now effectively under attack from three directions.

08 Surrounded

The Northumbrians and allied Mercians who remain on the field at Fulford are doomed. Norsemen surround them on high ground, and on other fronts they are pushed back across a road toward a steep embankment from which there is no escape. Scores of defenders are subsequently cut down or crushed in the melee.

09 The end of the line

Those Northumbrians who survive the slaughter pen at the embankment make a painful journey back toward York. The road to the city lies open to Harald and Tostig, and they accept its surrender.

Northumbrian /Mercian Army

TROOPS 5,000

EDWIN, EARL OF MERCIA

LEADER

The older brother of Morcar, Earl of Northumbria, Edwin opposed Norman rule in England and was killed in 1071.

Strengths Edwin led his troops in battle, standing side-by-side with them at Fulford.

Weakness Edwin failed to incite rebellion against the Normans.

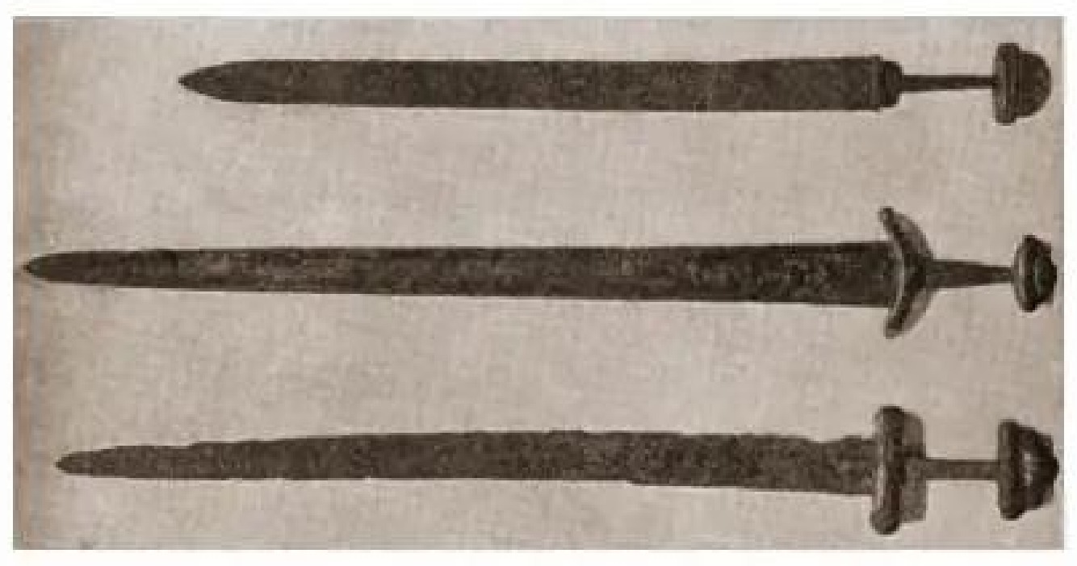
VETERAN TROOPS

KEY UNIT

Earls Edwin and Morcar were probably in charge of about 1,000 highly trained and experienced warriors at Fulford.

Strengths Stalwart in combat, experienced soldiers bolstered the Northumbrian ranks.

Weakness The earls' experienced troops at Fulford were too few to achieve victory.



SWORD

KEY WEAPON

Anglo-Saxon swords were fashioned with flat, double-edged blades of iron. Some were up to 40 centimetres in length.

Strengths The sword was durable and lethal in close combat.

Weakness Often heavy, the sword was useful only at close range.

© Alamy, Ed Crooks

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England's axe warriors

The elite housecarls are surrounded by myth, but were they really the fearless fighters of legend?

Almost everyone knows 1066. But how many people know that England was conquered 50 years earlier, in 1016? The invader then was Cnut – the king now known for vainly trying to turn back the tide. His victory marked the culmination of a century and a half of Viking attacks on England. However, having conquered the country, the Danes left England pretty much as it was. Their main innovation was the introduction of a new class of warrior – the housecarl. When the Normans landed in 1066, the spine of the army that faced William was composed of King Harold's own housecarls. In one of history's great ironies, this meant one set of Viking-derived warriors faced another: the knights of Normandy. The Normans were descendants of Vikings too, and so the battle for England had become a Viking affair.

Leading the battle on the English side, Harold's housecarls stood proud atop Senlac Hill, their shields locked in the warrior wall erected to prevent William's march into England. As the Norman knights charged up the hill, occasionally a brave man would step out of line, wedge his shield into the earth and swing his great two-handed Dane axe. Such was its momentum that it might cut horse and mail-clad rider in two.

These soldiers had already defeated the army of Harald Hardrada of Norway, the most feared Viking king of the time. Although they'd not even had three weeks to recover from the Battle of Stamford Bridge on 25 September, the confidence born of that victory must have sustained Harold and his men on the march south and as they formed their shieldwall. The housecarls were the elite troops of their age. Now, tested again, they would prove it.. Only, as we now know, they failed this final test. Many had fallen at Stamford Bridge, but even with their numbers depleted, they withstood William's men for a long, bloody day at Hastings – when most early-medieval battles ended within an hour. Even when King Harold fell, most of his housecarls fought to the death.

To explain the valour and combat strength of these troops, scholars examined the records of the time to find what set them apart from the norm. The majority of Harold's army was composed of the fyrd, the muster of free men called upon to take up arms in service of their king. These were farmers and artisans, armed with spears, wearing leather jerkins and carrying shields. They were strong and brave men – you couldn't take your place in a shieldwall without bravery – but not elite soldiers. The housecarls, on the other hand, were different.

> England's housecarls were directly inspired by the elite Viking bodyguards of King Cnut and his family

The word, derived from Old Norse and meaning 'house' and 'man' or 'servant', first appears in English records after Cnut's victory of 1016. Contemporary records are sketchy. They were members of noble households as warriors, and on one occasion tax collectors. However, to explain how such warriors could defeat Harald and come within an hour of holding back William, scholars looked to other sources. In particular they turned to the *Lex Castrensis Sive Curie*, contained in the late-12th-century works by the first Danish historians, Sven Aggeson and Saxo Grammaticus.

What wonderful material they found there. According to Aggeson and Grammaticus, Cnut had created a code of rules to regulate his warriors, called Witherlogh in Danish. Having won the throne of England, the king paid off the majority of his army with Danegeld (taxes) raised from his new subjects. One of the reasons so many people were so keen to invade England was the efficiency of its tax gatherers: Cnut raised the astonishing sum of 30,800 kilograms of silver to pay his men, and this was after the English had spent the previous two decades paying increasingly large sums of Danegeld to stave off invasion.

However, Cnut kept the crews of 40 ships to act as a standing army, paid for by a regular tax. He then promulgated a decree that any man wishing to join this elite warrior brotherhood must show their wealth and worth with gilded axe heads and sword hilts.

In the spirit of getting in with the new boss, as many Angles and Saxons as Danes applied to join Cnut's house men. Finding himself now king of a sea-spanning empire that encompassed England, Denmark, Norway and some of Sweden, Cnut had to find some way of knitting together his household troops. He did so by a law code that required the men to sit in order of precedence in his hall, with the noblest and bravest nearest the king. Infractions were punished by being sent to the end of the table, where the other housecarls might pelt the miscreant with bones and scraps.

A housecarl who offended had to be tried before the whole body of men. Even Cnut was not above the rules: when he killed a housecarl in anger, he was tried before the assembly of men. Although they acquitted him, Cnut fined himself for the crime.

Highly decorated metal helmets were a mark of a warrior's elite status

© York Museums Trust

Swords with intricate decoration were also a status symbol for the housecarls

© York Museums Trust

Generally, the punishment for killing another housecarl was exile or death, while treason was, naturally, punishable by death and confiscation of property. In return for their service, Cnut provided his housecarls with board, lodging, entertainment and a monthly salary. Housecarls were not bound to service, but according to the *Lex Castrensis*, they could only leave their post on one day during the year: New Year's Eve. This was also the day when the king gave gifts, thus making it less likely any man would leave his service.

So, according to the *Lex Castrensis*, Cnut had a standing army whose wages were paid for by regular taxation, and who were bound by a particular and unique law code. This was an extraordinary accretion of royal power and one unparalleled elsewhere in Europe.

But was it true? Remember, the reconstruction of the role and function of housecarls in English society between 1016 and 1066 was based almost completely on documents written in a different country in the late 12th century, more than 100 years, or at least four generations, later.

Scholars believed that these accounts were accurate because they matched two incidents from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which apparently described housecarls tried before their own assembly and sentenced according to the law code in the *Lex Castrensis*. The whole argument for reading a late-12th-century document back to the early-11th century rests upon these two entries in the *Chronicle* – and the correct translation of just three words. But now it seems those words – here, niðing and stefn – were not used in the precise

> "Many had fallen at Stamford Bridge, but even with their numbers depleted, they withstood William's men for a long, bloody day at Hastings"

Words to fight by

The ideals that moved Anglo-Saxon housecarls to serve – to the death if required

Loyalty

Loyalty was the keystone virtue for the Anglo-Saxon warrior – indeed, for the whole of Anglo-Saxon society. A housecarl was bound by oaths of loyalty to his lord. It was these oaths that fired his service and gave him the moral courage to fight on, even to death, should his lord fall. This loyalty is summed up in the Old English poem *The Battle Of Maldon*. With their lord struck down by Vikings, one of the remaining men rallied the rest with the words: "Thought must be the harder, heart the keener/Spirit shall be more – as our might lessens." Did these words run through the minds of Harold's housecarls as they fought to the end beside their king?

Courage

Loyalty wasn't worth much without courage – at least not in 11th-century England. The courage celebrated in poems such as *Beowulf* was tinged with the fatalism inherent in old Anglo-Saxon paganism, and then infused with Christian hope. The courage of the housecarl was founded on the twin beliefs that defeat was no refutation and that, for the faithful warrior, there was eternal reward.

Glory

Fame, glory and renown was the currency of the early-medieval warrior's life. A housecarl was bound to his lord by bonds of obligation and trust, but the glory won in battle and duels was what made a man's name and won him great renown.

Generosity

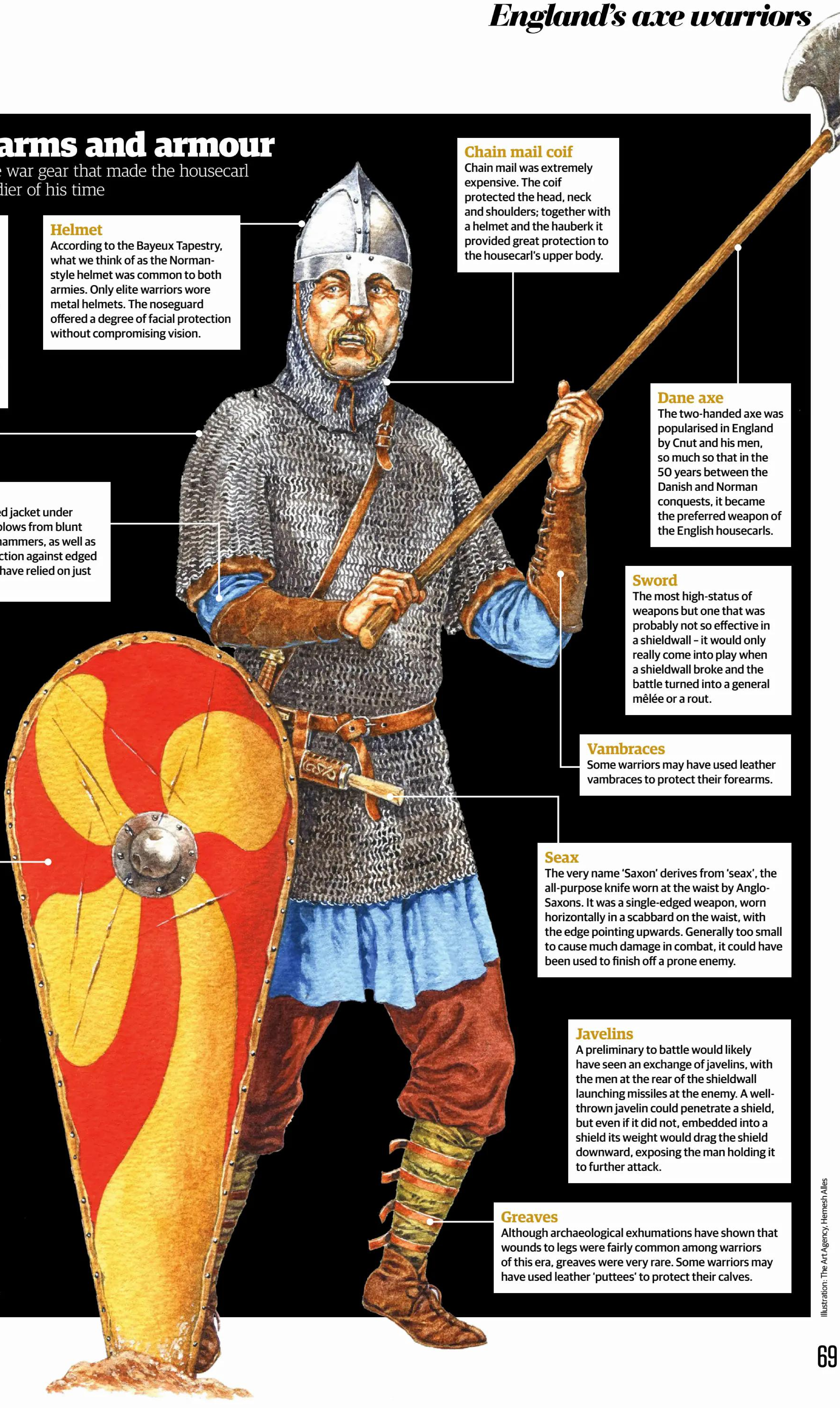
A king cemented the loyalty of his warriors – and indeed his entire kingdom – by the giving of gifts. After a successful battle, the ideal Anglo-Saxon king shared out the booty to his warriors, so much so that 'ring-giver' is a synonym for king in Anglo-Saxon poetry. This had the additional effect, though, of institutionalising warfare – the best, and sometimes singular way to acquire more gifts was to win them in battle.

Prestige

For all Anglo-Saxons, but particularly the warriors, words were vital. In what was still largely an oral culture, whose values were celebrated by the king's poet, or scop, words and stories bound a people to their origin, celebrated bravery in battle and the generosity of kings, and provided, through riddles and songs, entertainment through the long evenings. Orations and insults were an important part of the preliminaries to battle, used to bolster the courage of fellows and to sow uncertainty among the enemy.

Housecarl arms and armour

Arms and the man – the war gear that made the housecarl the most-feared foot soldier of his time



Chain mail hauberk

Chain mail was one of the greatest gifts a housecarl might receive from his lord. If a mail-clad warrior fell in battle, there would be a great struggle to strip the armour from the body. Mail was very effective protection against slashes or thrusts from swords or spears, although clubs could cause trauma without penetrating the armour.

Helmet

According to the Bayeux Tapestry, what we think of as the Norman-style helmet was common to both armies. Only elite warriors wore metal helmets. The noseguard offered a degree of facial protection without compromising vision.

Chain mail coif

Chain mail was extremely expensive. The coif protected the head, neck and shoulders; together with a helmet and the hauberk it provided great protection to the housecarl's upper body.

Dane axe

The two-handed axe was popularised in England by Cnut and his men, so much so that in the 50 years between the Danish and Norman conquests, it became the preferred weapon of the English housecarls.

Gambeson

Housecarls wore a padded, quilted jacket under the mail. This cushioned against blows from blunt weapons such as maces and warhammers, as well as providing a further layer of protection against edged weapons. Poorer warriors would have relied on just this padded jacket for defence.

Sword

The most high-status of weapons but one that was probably not so effective in a shieldwall – it would only really come into play when a shieldwall broke and the battle turned into a general mêlée or a rout.

Shield

The typical Anglo-Saxon shield was round, with a central boss, and made of lime, alder or poplar – light woods that are resistant to splitting. By the 11th century, the teardrop-shaped shield had also become widespread, providing greater whole body protection and, because it could more easily be jammed into the ground, it allowed housecarls to stand behind it while using the two-handed Dane axe.

Vambraces

Some warriors may have used leather vambraces to protect their forearms.

Seax

The very name 'Saxon' derives from 'seax', the all-purpose knife worn at the waist by Anglo-Saxons. It was a single-edged weapon, worn horizontally in a scabbard on the waist, with the edge pointing upwards. Generally too small to cause much damage in combat, it could have been used to finish off a prone enemy.

Spear

The ubiquitous weapon of the era. The mark of a free man was being allowed to carry a spear – slaves could not. Spears were the ideal weapon in the shieldwall, as they kept the enemy at distance while allowing the warrior to thrust at exposed areas. Some spears had small projections, or wings, that were used to hook and pull an enemy's shield out of position. Spears were usually used over-arm, aiming at the enemy's face.

Javelins

A preliminary to battle would likely have seen an exchange of javelins, with the men at the rear of the shieldwall launching missiles at the enemy. A well-thrown javelin could penetrate a shield, but even if it did not, embedded into a shield its weight would drag the shield downward, exposing the man holding it to further attack.

Greaves

Although archaeological exhumations have shown that wounds to legs were fairly common among warriors of this era, greaves were very rare. Some warriors may have used leather 'puttees' to protect their calves.

Illustration: The Art Agency, Hemesh Alles

sense demanded by this argument but had become generalised in the usage of the time.

The *Lex Castrensis* was composed in 12th-century Denmark as the king there was attempting to increase his control on contemporary housecarls, who really were a political and military elite. How much easier to do so if it could be shown that their law code went back to Cnut the Great himself? Therefore, we can answer cui bono: who would benefit from this historical interpolation?

Recent scholarship has debunked the old idea of the housecarls as a discrete, standing army, bound by its own set of laws and acting as the king's troubleshooters. So, who were the men that fought alongside Harold through the autumn of 1066?

Well, one thing is for sure: they had axes. The great two-handed Dane axes were their characteristic weapon and something that set them apart from the thegns of the pre-Cnut era. But, in most other ways, they were indistinguishable from the thegns who had long served the Anglo-Saxon kings as noble guards.

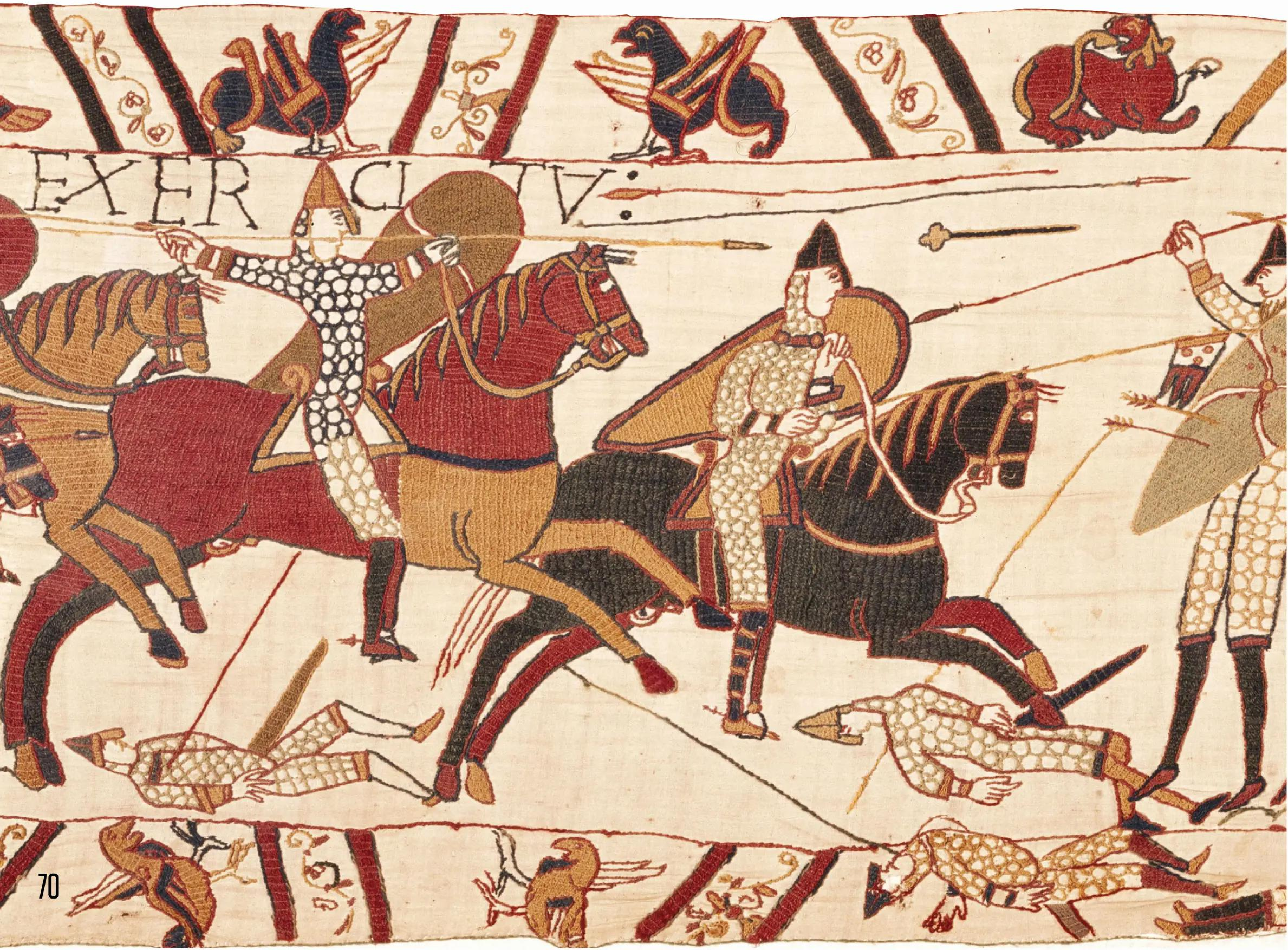
Thegns had started out as warriors, members of the warbands that the first generations of Anglo-Saxon kings gathered around them, held to service by the gift-giving of the king. As time passed, the duties of the thegn broadened. As reward for service, a thegn would be gifted land, where he acted as the king's representative, but this land returned to the king upon the thegn's death. However, with the rise of monasteries, this reversion of land became untenable: institutions needed to own their land in perpetuity so that they could adequately plan for the future. So, from Offa onwards, the Anglo-Saxon kings developed the idea of bookland, where ownership of land was inscribed in deeds into books of record.

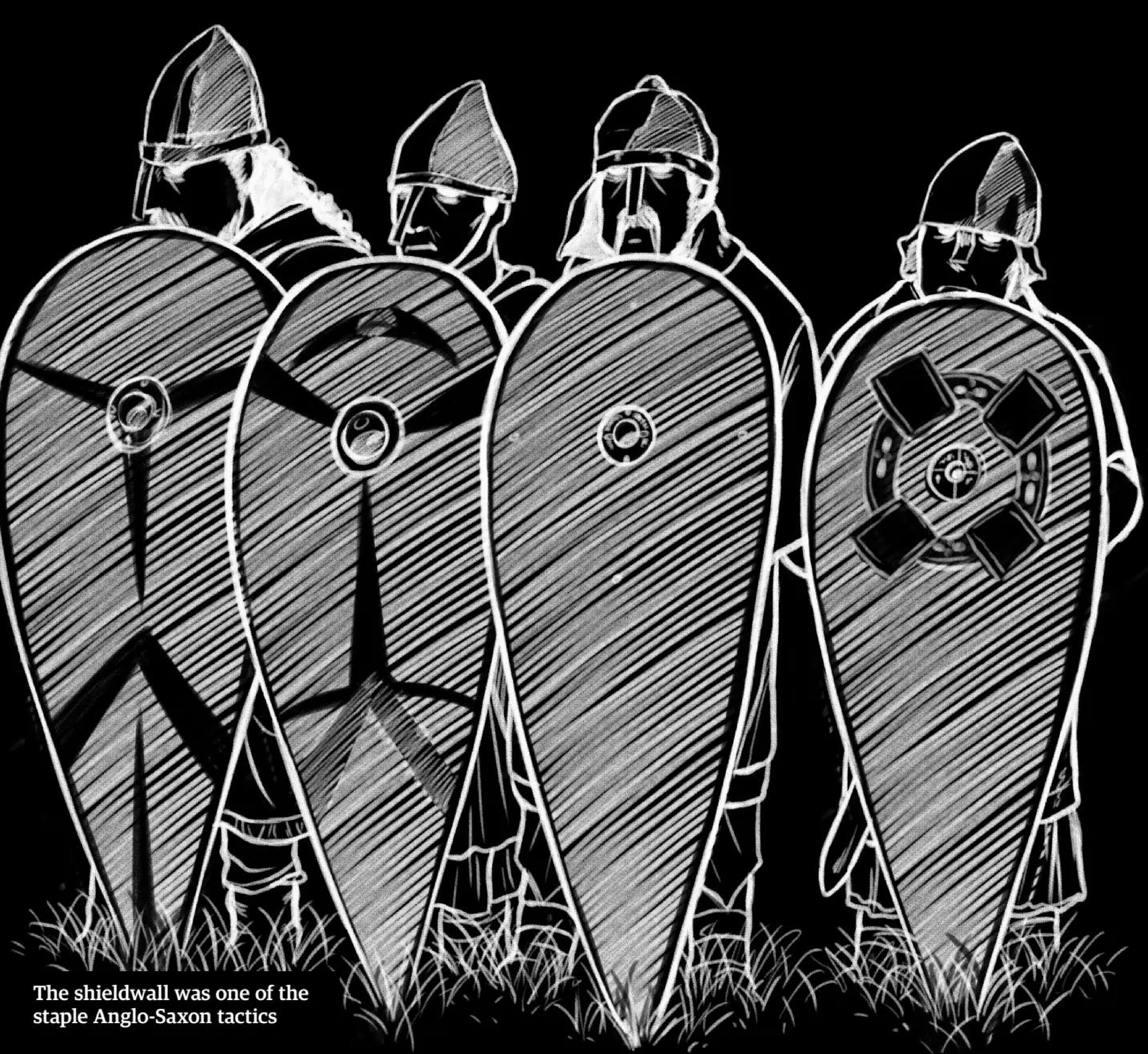
The idea, once developed, swiftly proved irresistible to the Anglo-Saxon warrior aristocracy, as it meant that a thegn could pass on land to his children, and hold that land within his family through the generations.

With this development, the qualification for the rank of thegn shifted towards property, so that by the time of Æthelred, a ceorl could ascend to the rank of thegn if he could assemble sufficient property, including five hides of land, a church, a kitchen and bell house, as well as duties in the king's hall. Even a merchant could become a thegn if he were able to fund three trading trips abroad. This was reflected in the language. Old English 'rice' ('rich' in modern English), which before had meant a powerful man, came to mean a man of wealth and property.

With increasing access to the rank of thegn, there grew increasing divisions within it, with those attending upon the king most highly ranked. Documents of the time sometimes refer to the same man as 'cynges huskarl' and 'minister regis'. The latter term ('minister to the king') indicates that housecarls, and particularly those attached to the king's household, had other duties apart from warfare – just as well, really, since even a society as chronically violent as 11th-century England was not permanently fighting.

One of the most vivid examples we have of the further duties of the housecarl comes from the brief reign of Harthacnut, Cnut's son. Not taking any chances on the supporters of the previous king, his late half brother, Harold Harefoot, Harthacnut had arrived on English shores with a fleet of 62 ships. Although he received the throne without demur,





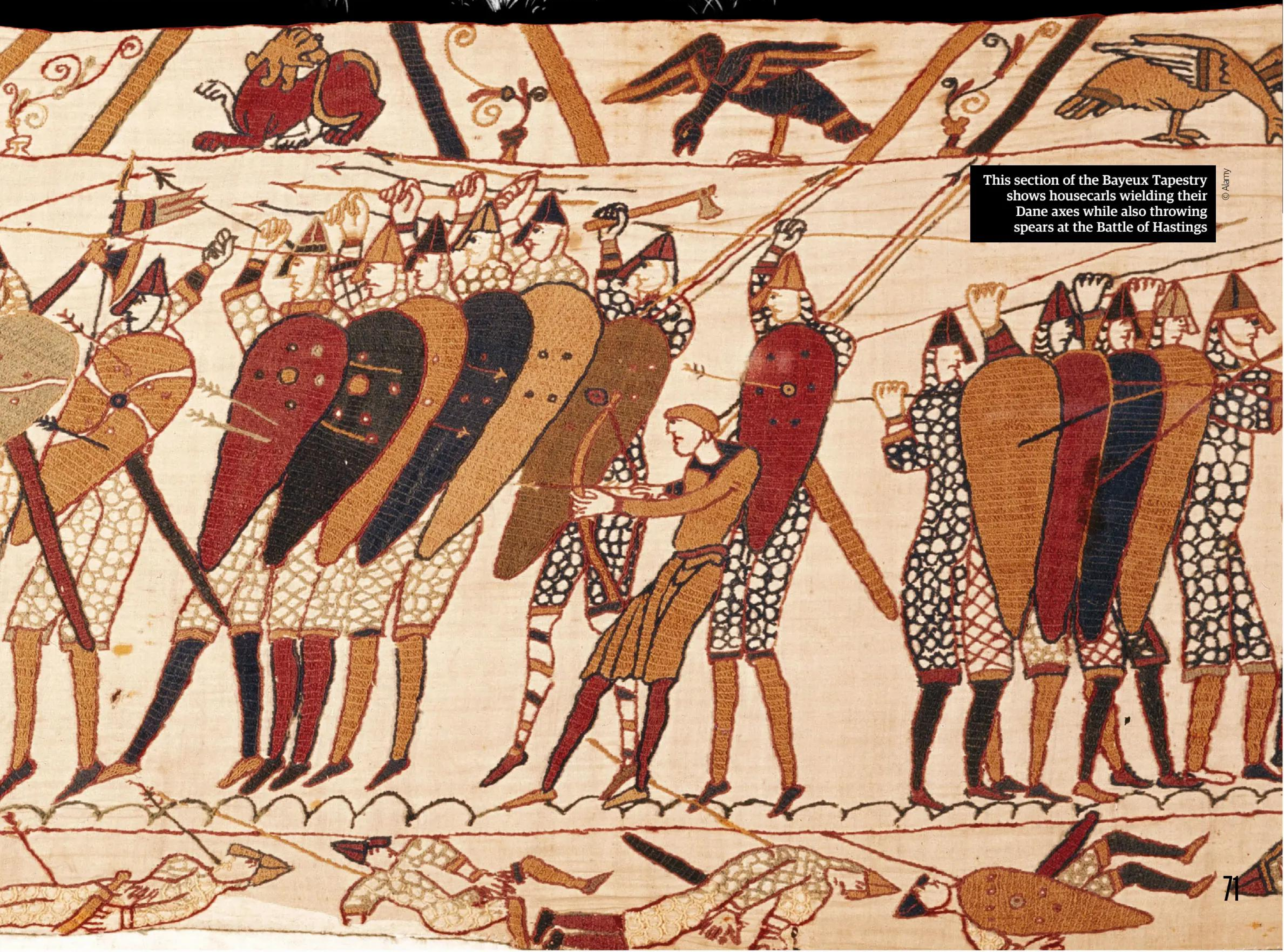
The shieldwall was one of the staple Anglo-Saxon tactics

Form ranks!

The business of housecarls was fighting - but how did they fight and with what weapons?

What set the housecarls of late Anglo-Saxon England apart from their warrior predecessors was their weapon of choice – the Dane axe – and their increasing use of the teardrop-shaped 'Norman' shield. As with all Anglo-Saxon warriors, they fought on foot, although as high-status warriors they rode to battle, forming up as the front rank of the shield wall and the personal bodyguard of the king and earls.

The Dane axe was a formidable weapon. Its haft, usually between three and four feet long (although display weapons had longer hafts), was held in both hands. The axe head was light and forged to be thin, with a reinforced, carbon-steel cutting edge. As wielding the Dane axe required both hands, the housecarl had to step out from the line of the shieldwall. This was where the shift to 'Norman' shields makes sense, as the shield could be planted in the earth in front of the housecarl, providing some protection against arrows. With both arms free, the housecarl could build momentum by swinging the Dane axe in circles. With so much stored energy, an enemy coming within striking distance ran the risk of being cut in two. The Bayeux Tapestry shows a housecarl cutting the head of a Norman knight's horse in half: in the battle itself, that housecarl could probably have cut right through the knight riding the horse as well.



This section of the Bayeux Tapestry shows housecarls wielding their Dane axes while also throwing spears at the Battle of Hastings

© Alamy

Harthacnut still had to pay off his men and, like his father, he did so by taxing the people he was going to reign over. Among the tax gatherers Harthacnut sent around the kingdom were his own housecarls, two of whom were sent to Worcester where they proceeded to annoy the local populace so much that they dispatched the tax gatherers.

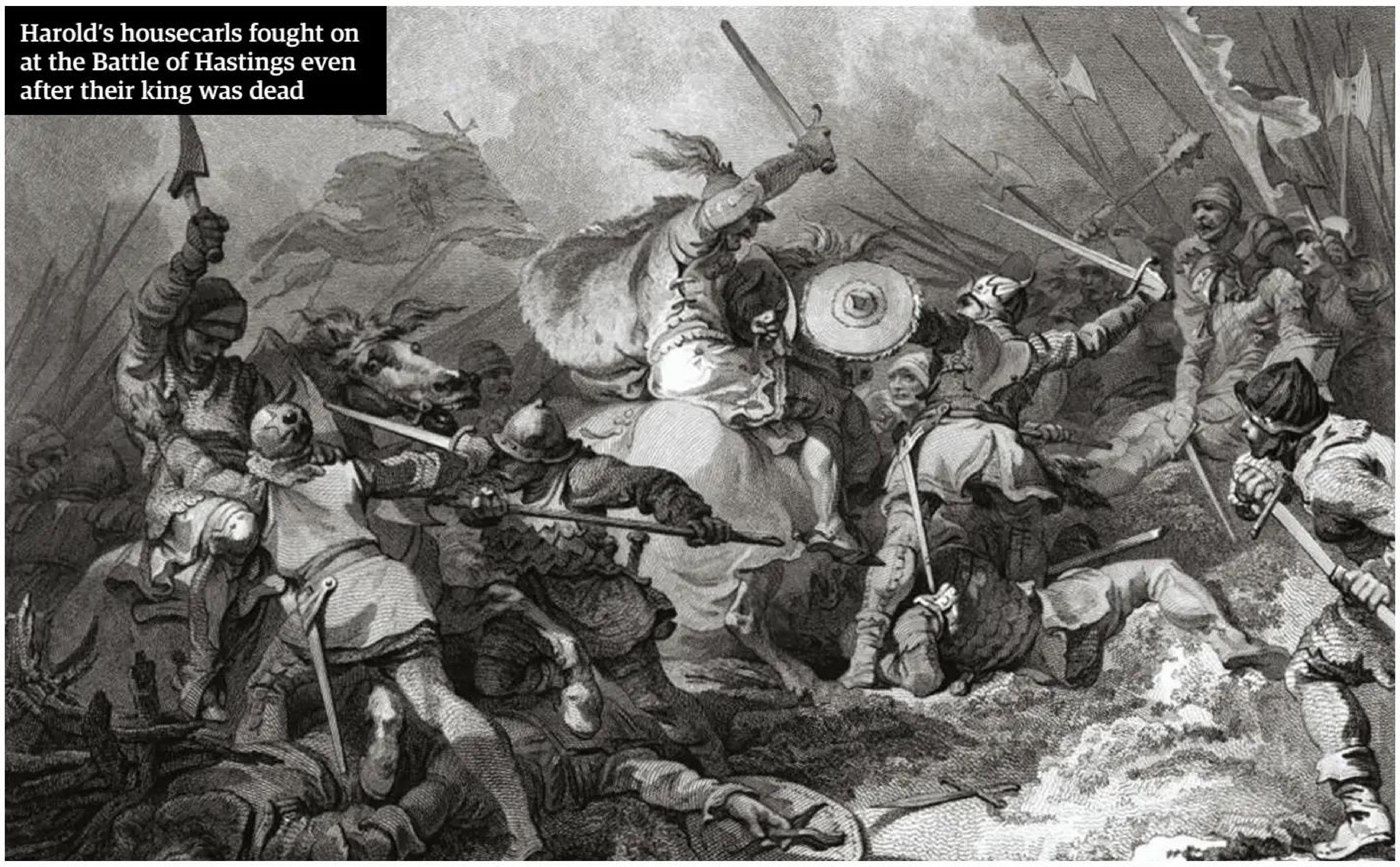
An enraged Harthacnut ordered the rest of his housecarls to Worcester with the command to ravage and burn the city, and to kill all the men. Luckily for the people of Worcester, they received warning and almost all fled with their lives. The housecarls looted for five days and then burned the city down, which was enough to assuage Harthacnut's anger.

As members of royal or noble households, housecarls were paid a wage, but they were not mercenaries. A mercenary is a soldier who fights for whoever will pay the price. In distinction, a housecarl served his lord, for which service he received a wage. There was no contradiction between receiving a wage and loyalty unto death.

This wage, and the gifts given by their lord, enabled those housecarls who were not landholders to pay for their war gear. Relatively few housecarls seem to have held land – the main source of wealth at the time – so they must have depended on payment, gift giving and trophy taking after battles or contests to build and maintain their war gear. Not surprisingly, housecarls lavished money upon their equipment. Particularly for those employed in the household of the king or his great earls, the more resplendent the war gear, the higher the status of the wearer. When it came to the chaos and blood of the shieldwall, good war gear became, quite literally, a matter of life and death.

We can say that recent scholarship indicates that the old idea of housecarls as a discrete body of men, bound by their own law code and acting as the king's standing army is false. After Cnut's conquest, the terms housecarl and thegn seem to have been used interchangeably, with the only significant difference being that housecarls were originally more likely to be Danish. As high-status warriors, they were still called upon to serve king and lord and, by virtue of their training and weapons, they did form an elite group of infantry. As the men of Harold's household stood on Senlac Hill, fingering the shafts of their Dane axes, they must have been confident in their ability to see off this new pretender to the crown of England.

We know they failed, but of those that survived, many went into exile and, taking their martial skills with them, migrated east to the court of the last Romans, the Emperors of Byzantium. In the aftermath of Hastings, English housecarls went on to form the backbone of the emperor's Varangian Guard, which became known as an Anglo-Saxon force. From the ends of the earth, the last housecarls finished their service at the centre of the world, serving the last emperors – a fitting swan song.



Harold's housecarls fought on at the Battle of Hastings even after their king was dead

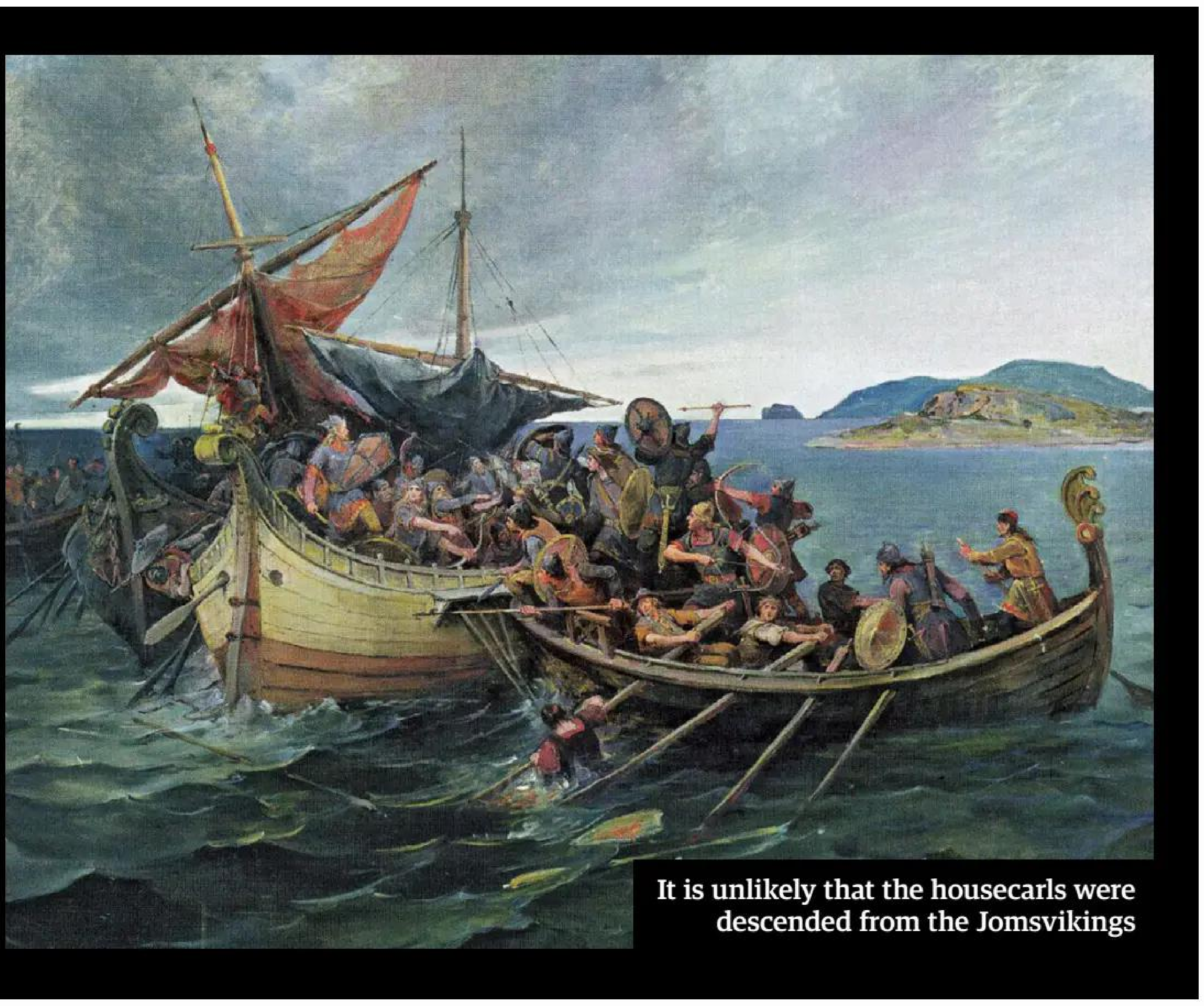
> "In most other ways, they were indistinguishable from the thegns who had long served the Anglo-Saxon kings"

Kin or myth?

Records claim housecarls descended from Jomsvikings – legendary mercenaries and pirates

According to the *Lex Castrensis*, a band of Jomsvikings formed the nucleus of Cnut's housecarls, but who were these Vikings? According to Norse sagas, they were a brotherhood of pagan warriors who had their stronghold at Jomsborg in Pomerania, on the southern shore of the Baltic Sea. To become a Jomsviking, a man (women and children were not admitted into their stronghold) who was aged between 18 and 50 had to prove himself, most often by besting a Jomsviking in a duel, fought according to rules of conduct. Once a Jomsviking, a man swore to avenge his brothers and to abide by the ruling of his officers in case of blood feud. Battle spoils were shared equally among the brotherhood and Jomsvikings could not spend more than three days away from camp without permission from their leader.

As warriors for hire, they fought in the dynastic wars of Sweden, Norway and Denmark, distinguishing themselves by their refusal to show any fear or to retreat from an enemy unless they were vastly outnumbered. But did they exist? The Norse sagas that tell of them were written after the dissolution of the brotherhood in the 11th century. Jomsborg has not been located. However, three runestones dating from the 10th century commemorate men who fell in the Battle of Fýrisvellir, when the Jomsvikings fought, and lost, alongside Styrbjörn the Strong. The current consensus is that the Jomsvikings did indeed exist, although the details of their code cannot be reliably affirmed. It seems unlikely, however, that they contributed much to the development of housecarls in England.



It is unlikely that the housecarls were descended from the Jomsvikings

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Shield wall
After their surprise with the approach of King Harold's Anglo-Saxon army at Stamford Bridge, the Norse army formed a shield wall in the shape of a triangle. Spearmen seen in the background appear to continue to hold a section of the shield wall as desperate fighting occurs in the centre.

Hardrada's ending
At the height of the Battle of Stamford Bridge, Norwegian King Harald Hardrada wields a battle axe against the Anglo-Saxon foe. This image is reported to depict Harald's last moments, and according to the historical record he died with an arrow in his throat.

Forgoing armour
King Harald and other Norse fighting men are depicted in this image wearing chain mail armour for protection. Actually, it is believed that many of the Norse soldiers had discarded their heavy mail since an impending battle was not expected.

Equine anachronism
Although one of Harald Hardrada's soldiers is depicted on horseback in this image of the Battle of Stamford Bridge, the horse was not a common sight on the battlefield at the time. The main function of horses was the transportation of troops and supplies.

Close combat
Norse and Anglo-Saxon soldiers flail swords at their enemies during close combat at the Battle of Stamford Bridge. Capable of inflicting mortal wounds, the double-edged swords of the day were limited in their effectiveness until opposing armies came within physical reach of one another.

Uneven footing
The fighting at Stamford Bridge was intense, and at times the dead and wounded were trampled under the feet of soldiers still locked in combat. Evidence of the brutality of the battle is seen in the anguished faces of the fallen at lower right.

Battle of Stamford Bridge

EAST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE, ENGLAND

25 SEPTEMBER 1066

In the autumn of 1066, Anglo-Saxon King Harold faced two serious threats to his crown. In the south, William, Duke of Normandy, was expected to land at any time, while in the north the Viking army of Norwegian King Harald Hardrada and Harold's previously exiled brother Tostig marched on the city of York, defeating an army of Northumbrians and Mercians under Earls Edwin and Morcar at the Battle of Fulford on September 20.

Harold knew the risk of moving northward to confront the Norse, but he had no choice. Marching his army of 15,000 over 180 miles in four days, Harold met the Viking army at Stamford Bridge, seven miles east of York, on 25 September. This was five days after his allies' resounding defeat at Fulford. Hardrada had left no troops at York to delay an attacking force so Harold, learning his enemy was ensconced on either side of the River Derwent, marched directly through the city. The Norse army was taken by surprise and virtually annihilated.

As the vanguard of the Anglo-Saxon army attacked, the small number of Norse soldiers on the west bank of the Derwent were overwhelmed. The survivors fled across the bridge and the alarm was raised west of the river. Hardrada quickly formed his army into a shield wall in the shape of a triangle. A single Norse warrior was said to have stood his ground at the bridge, slaying 40 Anglo-Saxons and delaying Harold's attack. Finally, the lone defender was killed when one of Harold's men floated beneath the bridge and delivered a fatal blow through its timbers with a spear.

Once the bridge was cleared, the Anglo-Saxons hurried across, locked their shields together, and mounted a furious charge. Fighting lasted several hours, and as the sun climbed high in the sky Harold was finally successful in breaching the Norse shield wall. In the heat of battle, Hardrada was killed by an arrow that struck him in the throat. In the fading light of dusk, Tostig attempted to rally the remaining Norse troops, raising the raven banner of the Vikings until he was struck down as well.

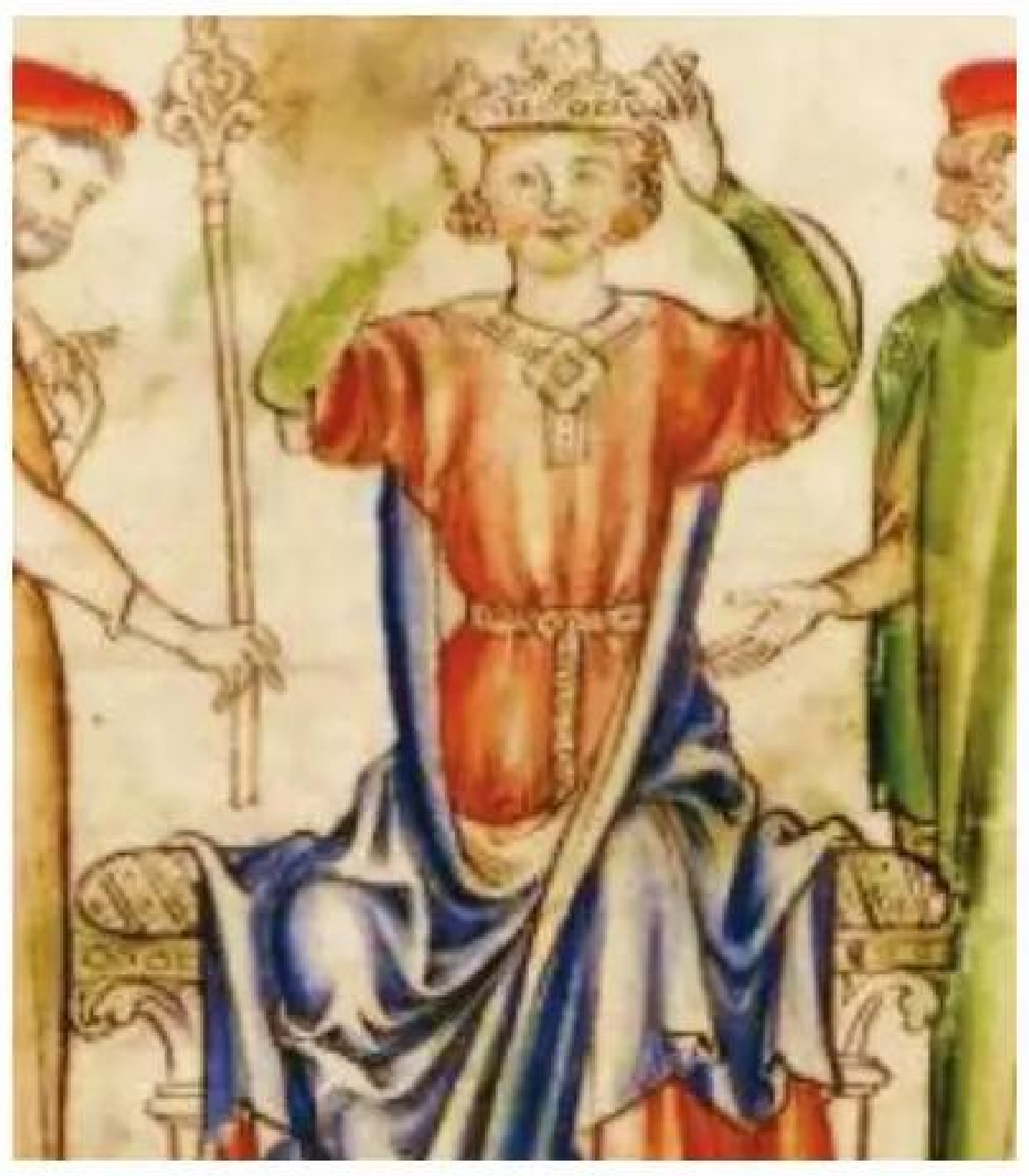
As the Norse army began to collapse, Eysten Orri, the brother-in-law of Hardrada, came forward with a contingent of troops that had been detailed to guard the Viking ships at Riccall. The heroic effort is remembered as "Orri's Storm," and though briefly stemming the relentless Anglo-Saxon tide, the outcome of the battle had already been decided.

Harold's losses at Stamford Bridge amounted to 5,000 men, one-third of his strength. Norse losses topped 6,000, and only 24 of the 300 available ships were needed to carry the defeated Vikings back to Norway. Harold was unable to savour his victory, turning south swiftly for another grueling march to meet William and the Normans coming ashore.

Harold's rendezvous with destiny at the Battle of Hastings was only days away. Without doubt, the losses sustained at Stamford Bridge weakened his army substantially and altered the course of history.

Anglo-Saxon Army

TROOPS 15,000



HAROLD GODWINSON

LEADER

Harold Godwinson, or King Harold II, was the last Anglo-Saxon King of England. His reign lasted only a few months.

Strengths Harold was decisive, and his boldness won the day at Stamford Bridge.

Weakness Harold was possibly duplicitous, having previously sworn allegiance to William, Duke of Normandy.

HOUSECARLS

KEY UNIT

Among the troops serving under Harold at Stamford Bridge were a number of housecarls, who also performed administrative duties.

Strengths These housecarls were in the personal service of the king.

Weakness Some of the housecarl troops were actually paid mercenaries.

SHIELD

KEY WEAPON

These were made of glued planks with an iron boss in the middle

Strengths Sometimes locked together for mutual protection, the shield was indispensable.

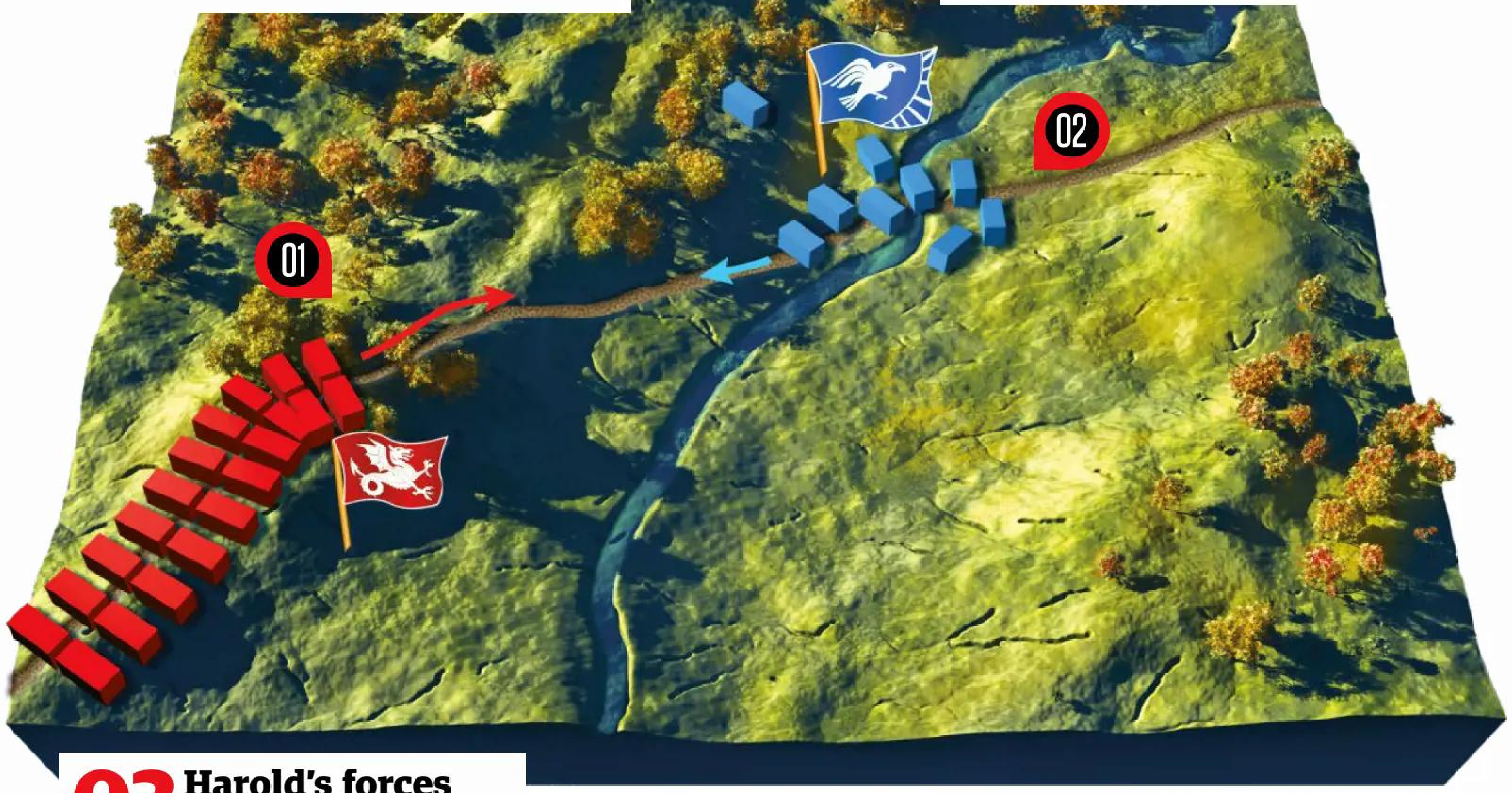
Weakness Shields were sometimes unwieldy in combat and difficult to carry.

01 Direct route

Following the defeat of his allies at Fulford, Anglo-Saxon King Harold reaches the field at Stamford Bridge after force-marching his 15,000-man army more than 180 miles in four days, surprising the Norse army of King Harald Hardrada along the banks of the River Derwent on 25 September 1066. Harold has taken advantage of a direct route through the city of York, where Harald has failed to post any troops.

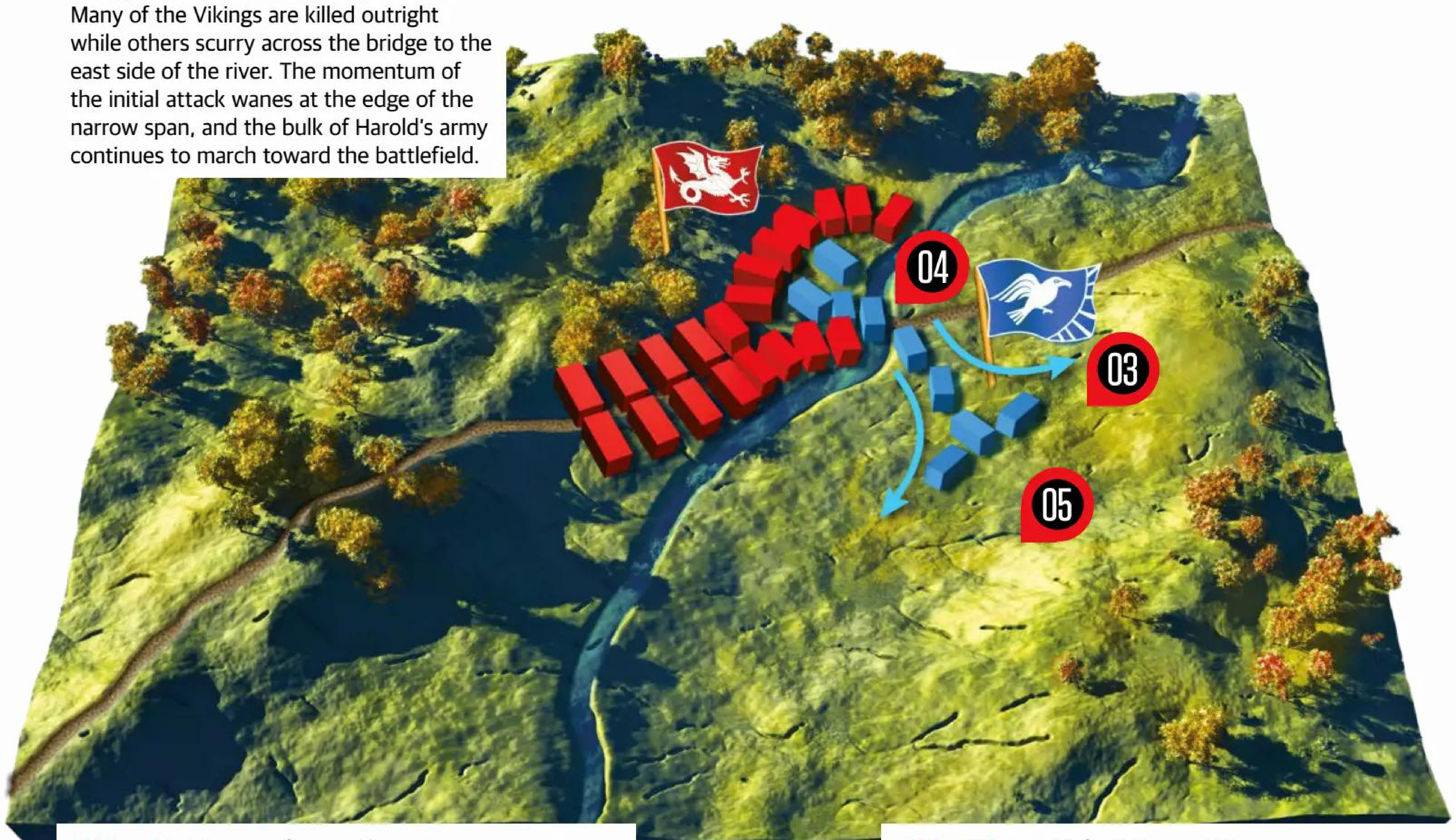
02 Anglo-Saxons approach

Due to the heat of the day and their apparently decisive victory at Fulford, many of the Norse soldiers have discarded their heavy chain mail armour. Savouring their triumph, the fatigued Norsemen lounge in the grass. To a man they are unaware of impending disaster. Hardrada and his lieutenants do not know that their army is in peril until the Anglo-Saxons are upon them.



03 Harold's forces march onwards

As the fighting begins, a small contingent of Norse troops west of the Derwent is put to flight by the marauding Anglo-Saxons. Many of the Vikings are killed outright while others scurry across the bridge to the east side of the river. The momentum of the initial attack wanes at the edge of the narrow span, and the bulk of Harold's army continues to march toward the battlefield.



04 Crossing the Derwent

A lone Norse soldier puts up a tremendous fight at the bridge, holding his position for a remarkable period and killing 40 Anglo-Saxons in the process. At last, one of Harold's soldiers floats in a half-barrel below the bridge and kills the intrepid Viking with a spear thrust. Within minutes, the Anglo-Saxons cross the Derwent, form up, and charge Hardrada's position on the east bank of the river.

05 A shield wall

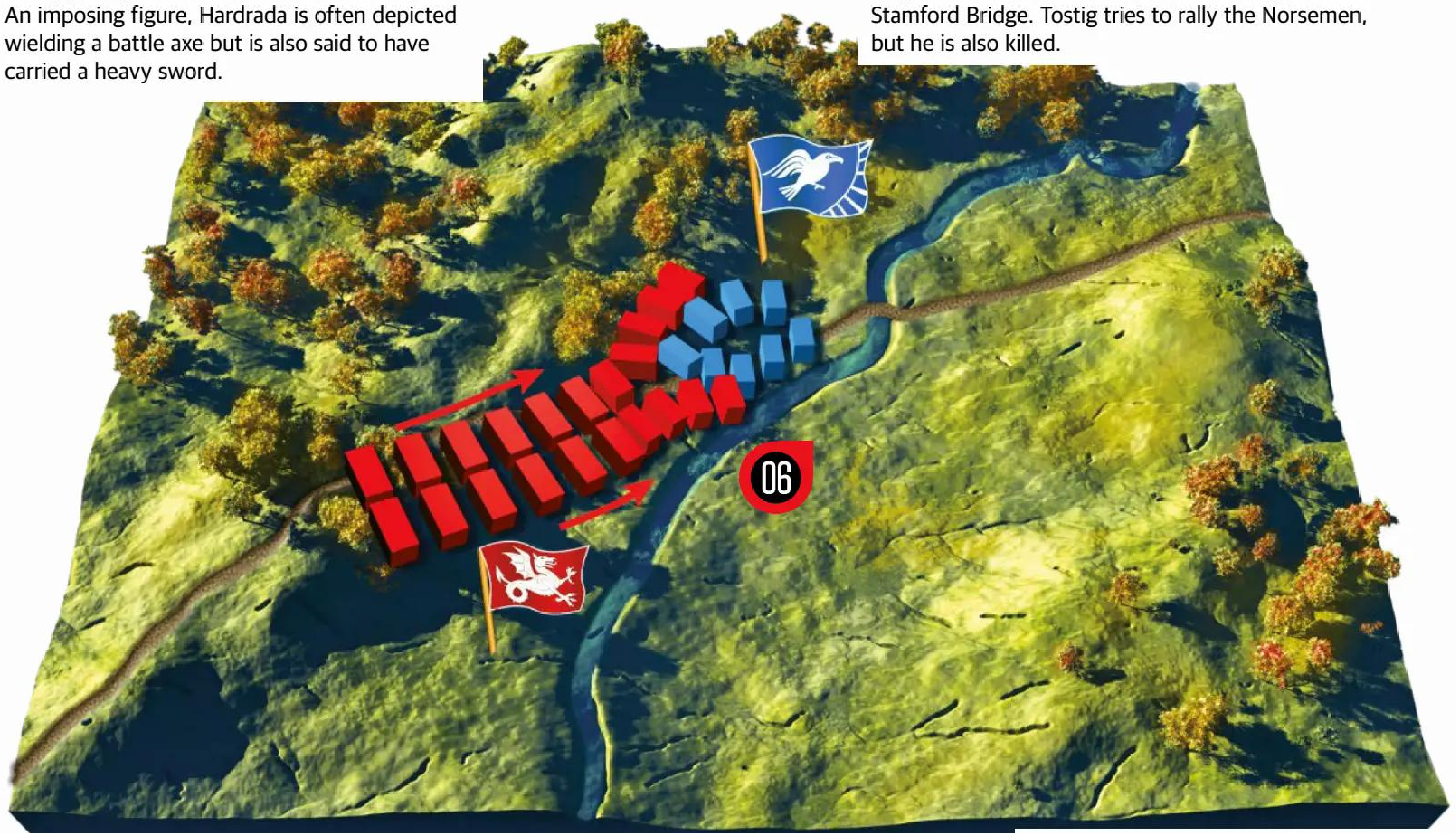
Hardrada utilises the time his valiant single soldier has bought at the bridge to form his troops in a shield wall in the shape of a triangle, presenting a narrow and mutually supportive front to the attacking Anglo-Saxons. Harold's men hit their enemy repeatedly, and the assaults weaken the Norse shield wall. However, the defenders refuse to yield as the battle wears on throughout the day.

06 Swords clash

By late afternoon, Hadrada's formation has begun to crack. The ring of sword on sword and spear on shield echoes as the opposing forces draw close to one another. An imposing figure, Hardrada is often depicted wielding a battle axe but is also said to have carried a heavy sword.

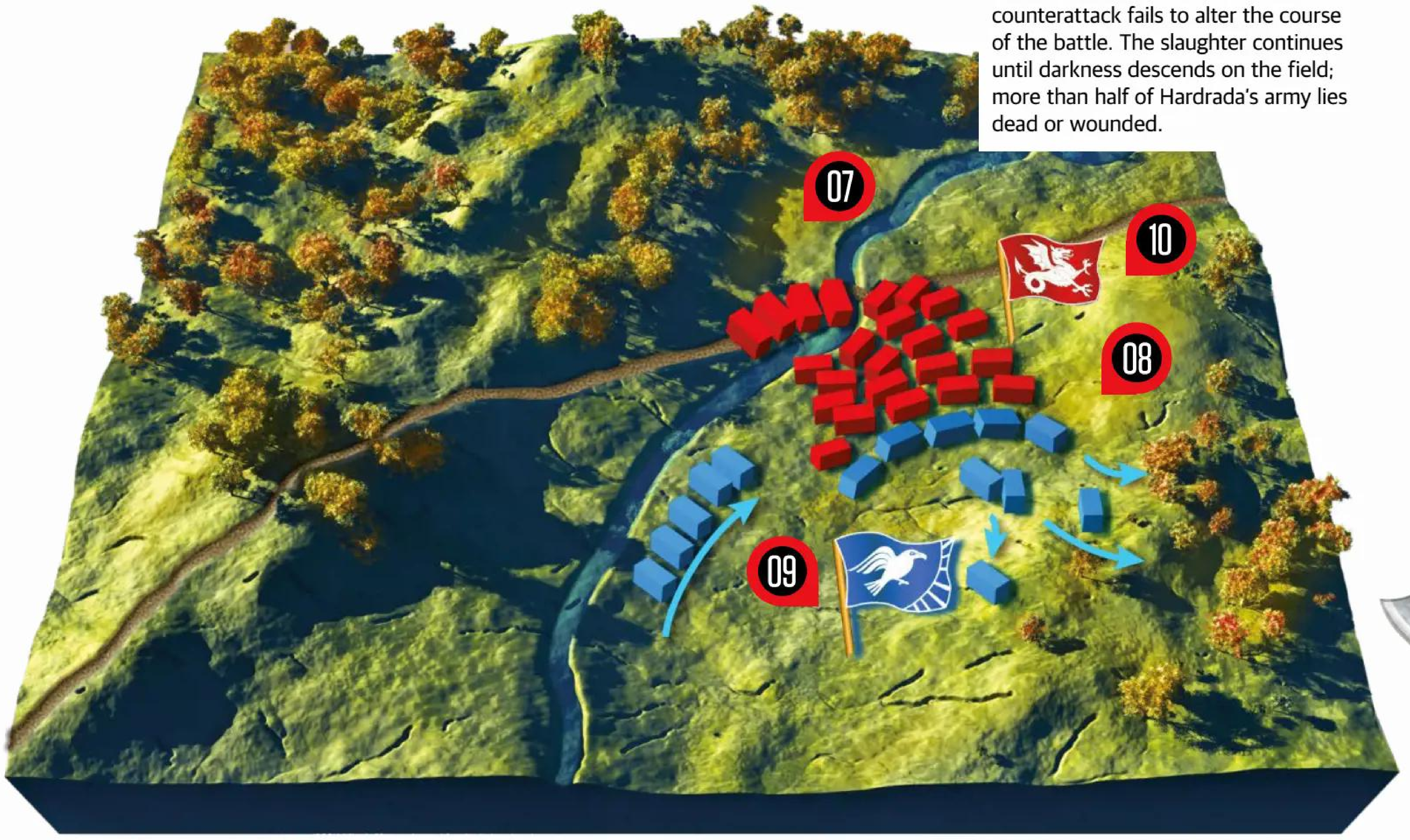
07 Hardrada falls

As daylight begins to fade, Hardrada remains in the thick of the fighting, inspiring his soldiers. A single arrow pierces his throat, and the King of Norway falls dead amid the carnage at Stamford Bridge. Tostig tries to rally the Norsemen, but he is also killed.



08 Mounting a counter attack

Hardrada's brother-in-law, Eystein Orri, leads a spirited charge by soldiers previously detailed to guard the Norse longboats. Orri dies, and the counterattack fails to alter the course of the battle. The slaughter continues until darkness descends on the field; more than half of Hardrada's army lies dead or wounded.



09 The Norse retreat

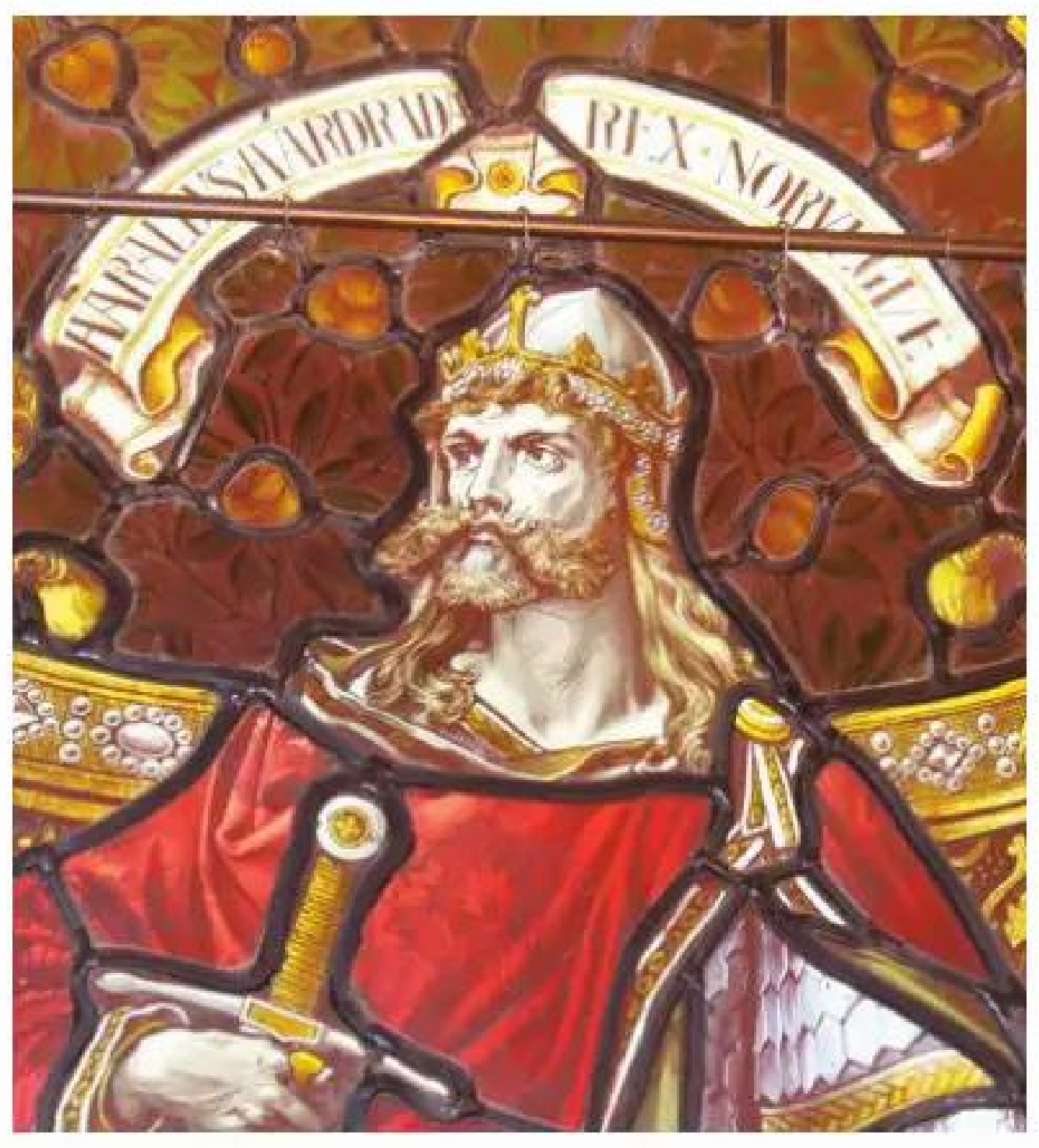
The battle turns into a rout, and the Anglo-Saxons pursue the defeated Norsemen toward their base at Riccall. Only 24 ships are required for the surviving Norse soldiers to make their escape.

10 Harold turns south

Harold and the Anglo-Saxons have no time for celebration, turning southward to embark on another long march toward William and the Normans, who have landed on English soil.

Norse Army

TROOPS 11,000
SHIPS 300



HARALD HARDRADA

LEADER

Harald Hardrada of Norway died of an arrow to the throat attempting to claim the English throne.

Strengths A man of great physical stature, Harald was fearless in battle.

Weakness Hardrada allowed Tostig, Anglo-Saxon King Harold's brother, to persuade him to invade England.

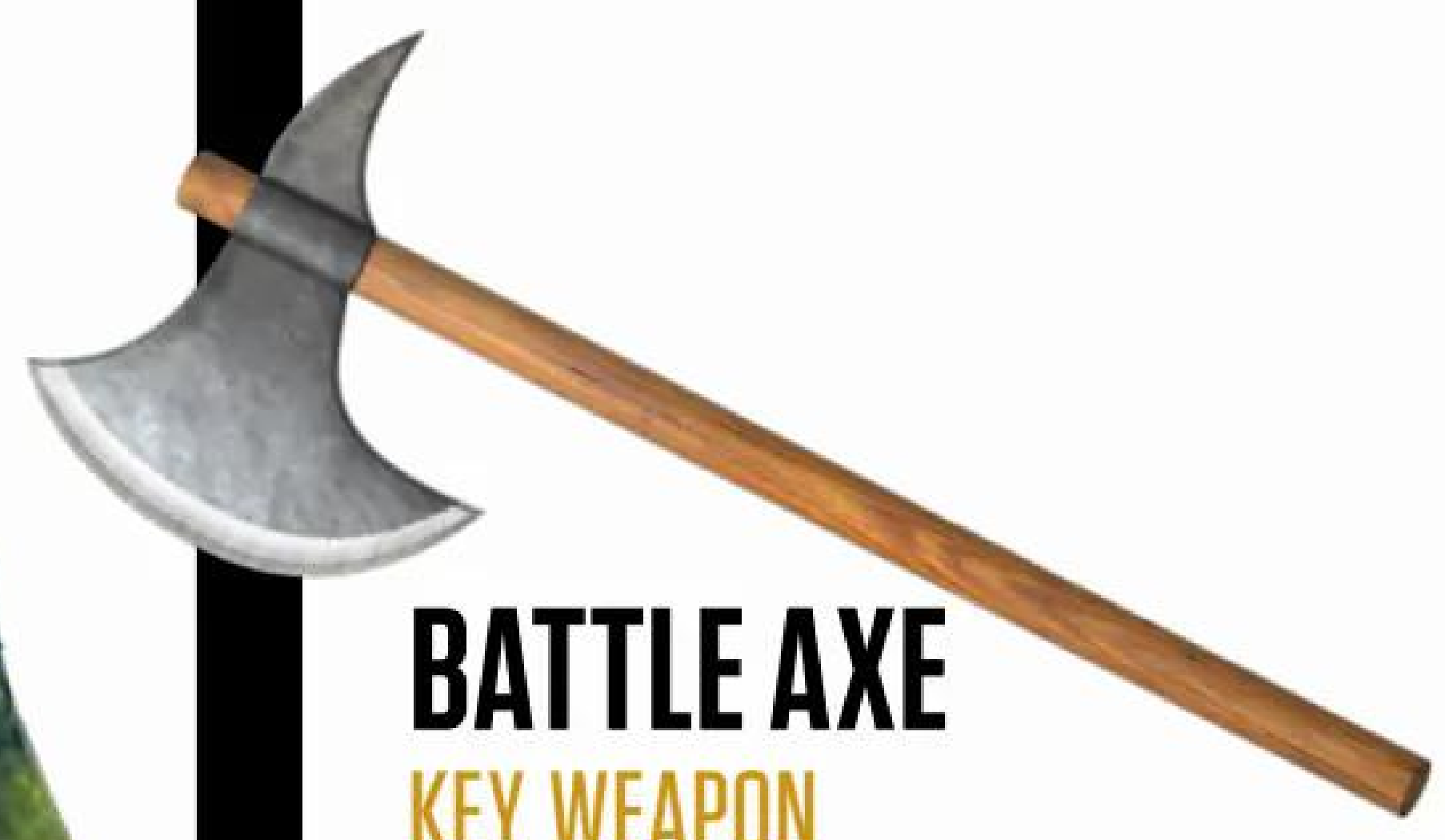
VETERAN SOLDIERS

KEY UNIT

Harald Hardrada's Vikings, or Norsemen, were experienced, familiar with campaigning hardships.

Strengths The Norsemen were a warrior people, proud of their combat prowess.

Weakness At Stamford Bridge, the Norse soldiers were overconfident and caught off-guard.



BATTLE AXE

KEY WEAPON

The Viking battle axe was crafted with a sturdy wooden haft and head of iron or carbon steel with a pronounced edge.

Strengths A well-struck blow from a battle axe meant near-certain death or incapacitation.

Weakness Battle axes were very heavy and primarily useful only at close quarters.

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Battle of Hastings

HASTINGS, ENGLAND

14 October 1066

One of the most influential conflicts in British history, the Battle of Hastings was a cataclysmic culmination of a war of succession, with three potential heirs to the English throne duking it out for control of the island nation. At the start of the war there were three competing for the throne, which Edward the Confessor had held till his death. These were Edward's cousin, Duke William of Normandy; Harold Godwinson, the most powerful man in England; and the Norwegian Harald Hardrada, who was king of Norway and distantly related. These three rivals were soon reduced to two however, with Harold Godwinson defeating Harald Hardrada at the Battle of Stamford Bridge in Yorkshire, England, on 25 September 1066.

This defeat left just Duke William of Normandy and Harold Godwinson to battle it out for the title of king; in fact, Godwinson took the title prematurely after Stamford Bridge, believing that Edward had promised him the throne before his death, despite his closer familial relation to William. This angered the French duke immensely and, after gaining support from the Vatican, he assembled a vast army consisting of men from Normandy, Flanders, Brittany and France (ie Paris).

Just days after the Battle of Stamford Bridge, William set sail for England and, landing on the south coast, began moving towards London. Harold soon got wind of the invasion and, reassembling his remaining army, marched south at great speed to intercept William. The two armies met on Senlac Hill about ten kilometres (six miles) north-west of the town of Hastings in Sussex.

Harold approached the battle three weeks after the Battle of Stamford Bridge with a depleted and tired force (they had marched all the way back from Yorkshire), while in contrast the Norman-French forces were fresh and greater in number. As can be seen in the detailed battlemap and run-through of the key events overleaf, it was an incredibly bloody affair and one in which we all know William came out on top, subsequently taking the English throne.

Many reasons have been put forward by military historians for Harold's defeat, but most agree on three pivotal points. Firstly, he was too keen to engage the threat of William, marching an exhausted army all the way from northern England at great speed to fight. Secondly, despite stopping by in London en route to face William, he failed to appreciate the city's defensive capabilities and didn't hole up there – a move that would have swung the odds much more in his favour. And finally, after taking up an advantageous position on the battlefield (atop Senlac Hill) he failed to maintain discipline within his troops, which meant the lines were broken easily by a little deception.

Unlike the results of many other succession wars, this outcome radically altered the way England developed. Once William had succeeded Harold, the Norman Conquest of the country began proper – a process that would see the vast majority of the ruling classes displaced as well as a complete overhaul of the country's administrative structure – the *Domesday Book* is great evidence of this.

The Anglo-Saxon language was also phased out in favour of French, trading and diplomatic ties with mainland Europe strengthened, new stone castles, cathedrals and civic buildings were built all over the country, and England became a new financial powerhouse in Europe. Britain in general was hugely shaped by the Norman takeover.

> Hastings was one of the most important battles in the history of Britain, changing its society and structure forever

Strong infantry

The Anglo-Saxon force led by King Harold consisted of a large body of infantry and archers, with very few cavalry units. This was partially due to Harold's depleted force after the Battle of Stamford Bridge, but also because this is how Harold's army was set up to fight, with ranks of infantry relying on fierce melee combat rather than complex manoeuvring tactics to win.

Strong cavalry

Unlike the Anglo-Saxons, the Normans were horse masters who brought numerous cavalry units into battle. Noble knights were trained from an early age in horsemanship and use of the lance, a spear-like weapon that could be used both in hand-to-hand and ranged combat. These cavalry units were therefore well trained and well equipped and, at the Battle of Hastings, proved pivotal to victory.

Rain of death

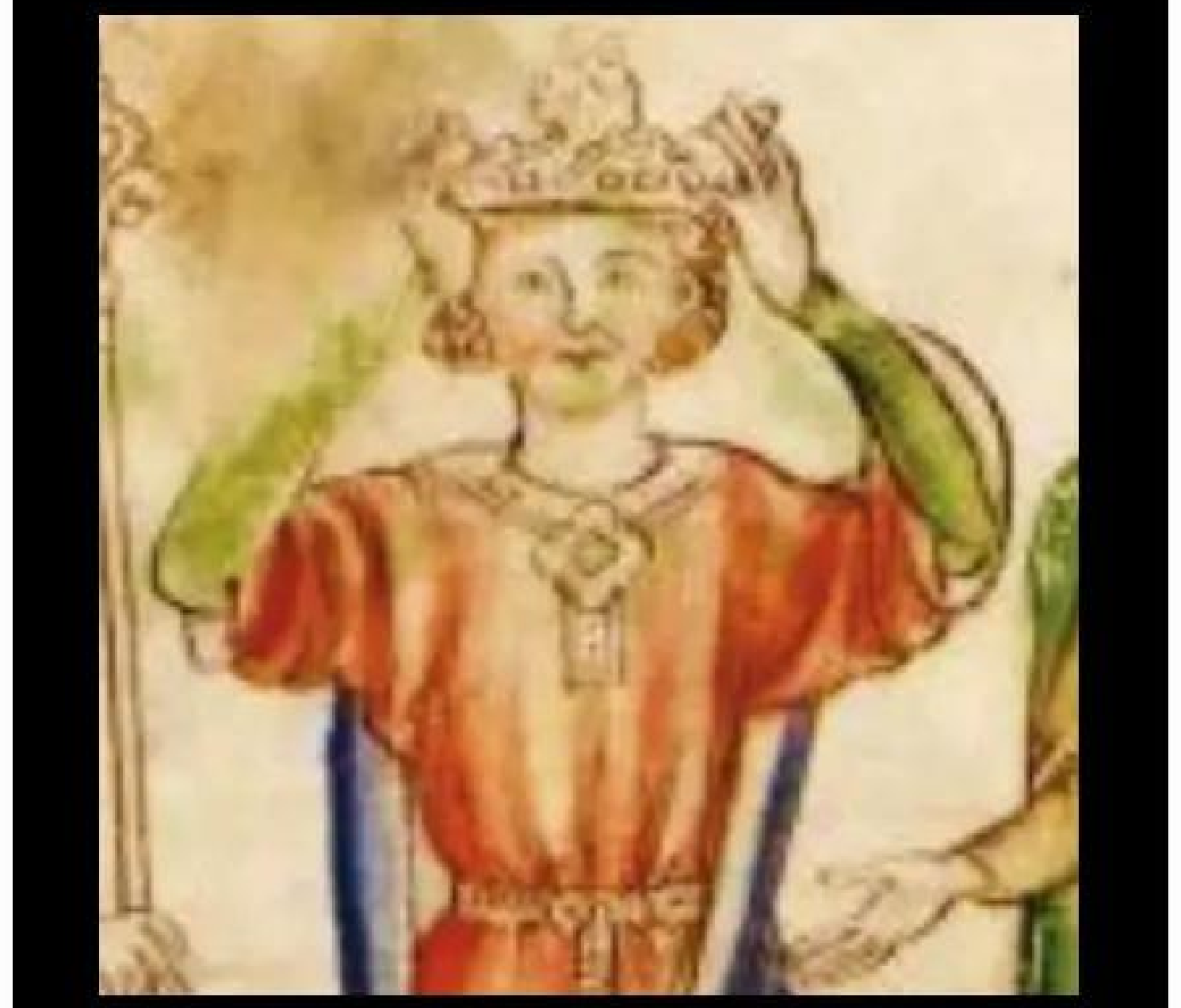
The one thing the Anglo-Saxons did bring to the battle was their elite longbowmen. These archers, who were considered the best in the world for centuries, bombarded any advance made by the Norman-French cavalry and infantry, bringing down a rain of arrows from a relatively safe, elevated position behind the Anglo-Saxon shield wall.

King Harold

King Harold had been ruler of England since 6 January 1066, taking the crown after the death of Edward the Confessor. Prior to the Battle of Hastings Harold had already had to defend his crown by repelling a large invading force led by Harald Hardrada of Norway, defeating them at Stamford Bridge. Directly after Harold marched his army all the way to Hastings – a decision that would cost him not just his crown but also his life.

Anglo-Saxon

Troops
7,000
Cavalry
Unknown

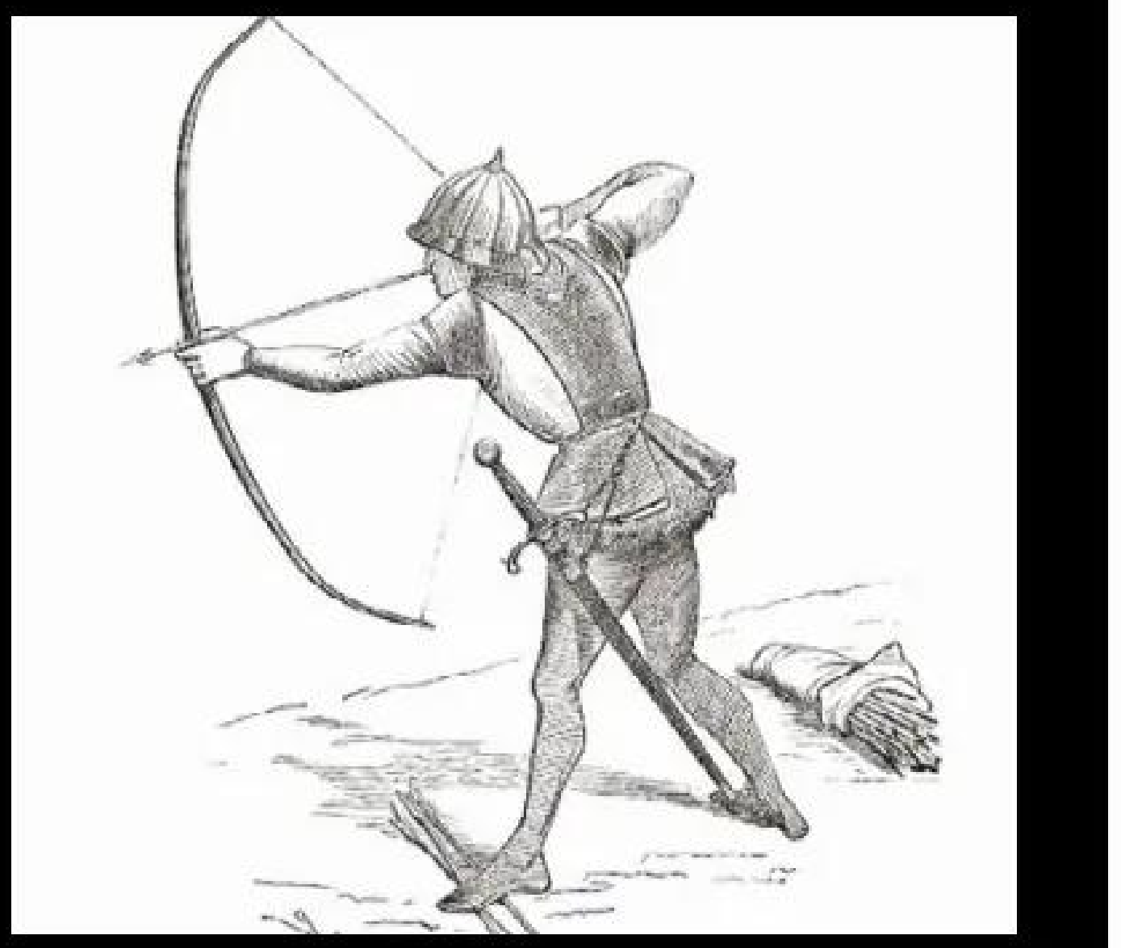


King Harold II
Leader

Prior to becoming king of England, Harold was a powerful nobleman and earl of several counties including East Anglia and Wessex. He accrued power through a number of successful military campaigns.

Strengths A battle-hardened warrior-king with a strong army and plenty of combat experience.

Weaknesses Overly confident after Stamford Bridge.

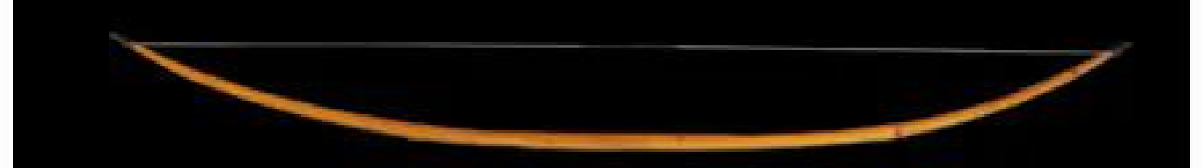


Longbowmen
Important Unit

Excellent shots and fast on their feet, longbowmen specialised in bombarding enemies with arrows.

Strengths The most well-trained and accurate archers in the world

Weakness Like all archers, they are fairly vulnerable up close in hand-to-hand fighting.



Longbow
Key Weapon

A fearsome weapon that took out many Norman soldiers early on. It was the sniper rifle of its day.

Strengths Amazing range and stopping power compared to standard bows.

Weaknesses Required great upper body strength and lots of practice.

1 Senlac Hill

The battle commenced with King Harold arranging his army on Senlac Hill, an elevated position close to Hastings. A mix of infantry and archers was laid out with the foot soldiers forming a vast, defensive shield wall from which Harold intended to repel any Norman-French advance.

2 Opening barrage

William laid out his forces a little way from the hill and ordered his archers to loose. His lower elevation and the size of the Anglo-Saxon shield wall meant little damage was caused.

3 The wall holds

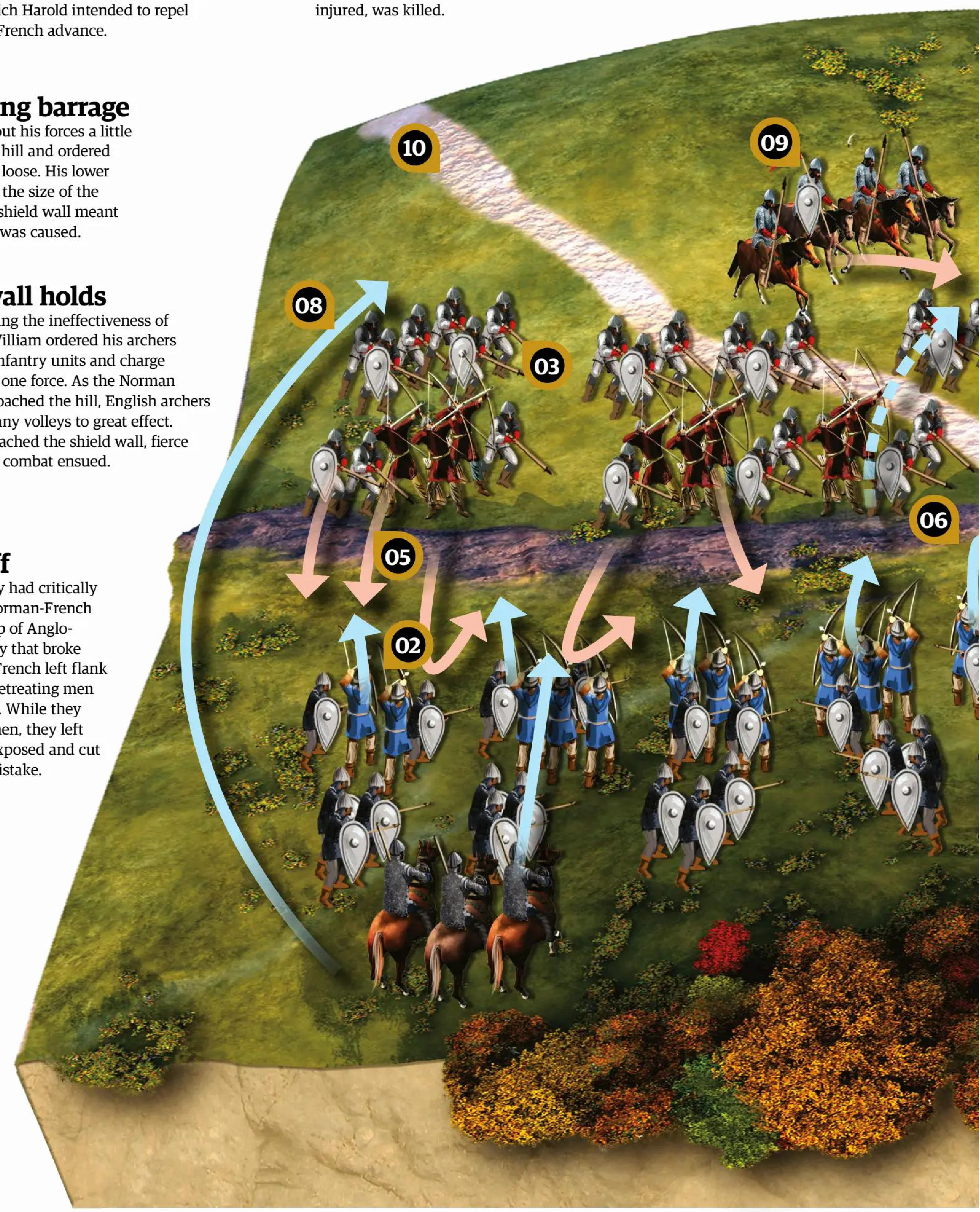
After witnessing the ineffectiveness of his archers, William ordered his archers to rejoin his infantry units and charge the enemy as one force. As the Norman infantry approached the hill, English archers unleashed many volleys to great effect. When they reached the shield wall, fierce hand-to-hand combat ensued.

5 Cut off

Believing they had critically broken the Norman-French line, the group of Anglo-Saxon infantry that broke the Norman-French left flank pursued the retreating men down the hill. While they killed more men, they left themselves exposed and cut off – a fatal mistake.

9 King Harold killed

William's play was a success and in the early evening the Anglo-Saxon shield wall finally broke. A period of intense, desperate fighting began on the hill, with many troops falling on both sides. There was little to no positional discipline now. Around 6pm Harold's personal standard was attacked and the English king, who had already been injured, was killed.



4 William not dead

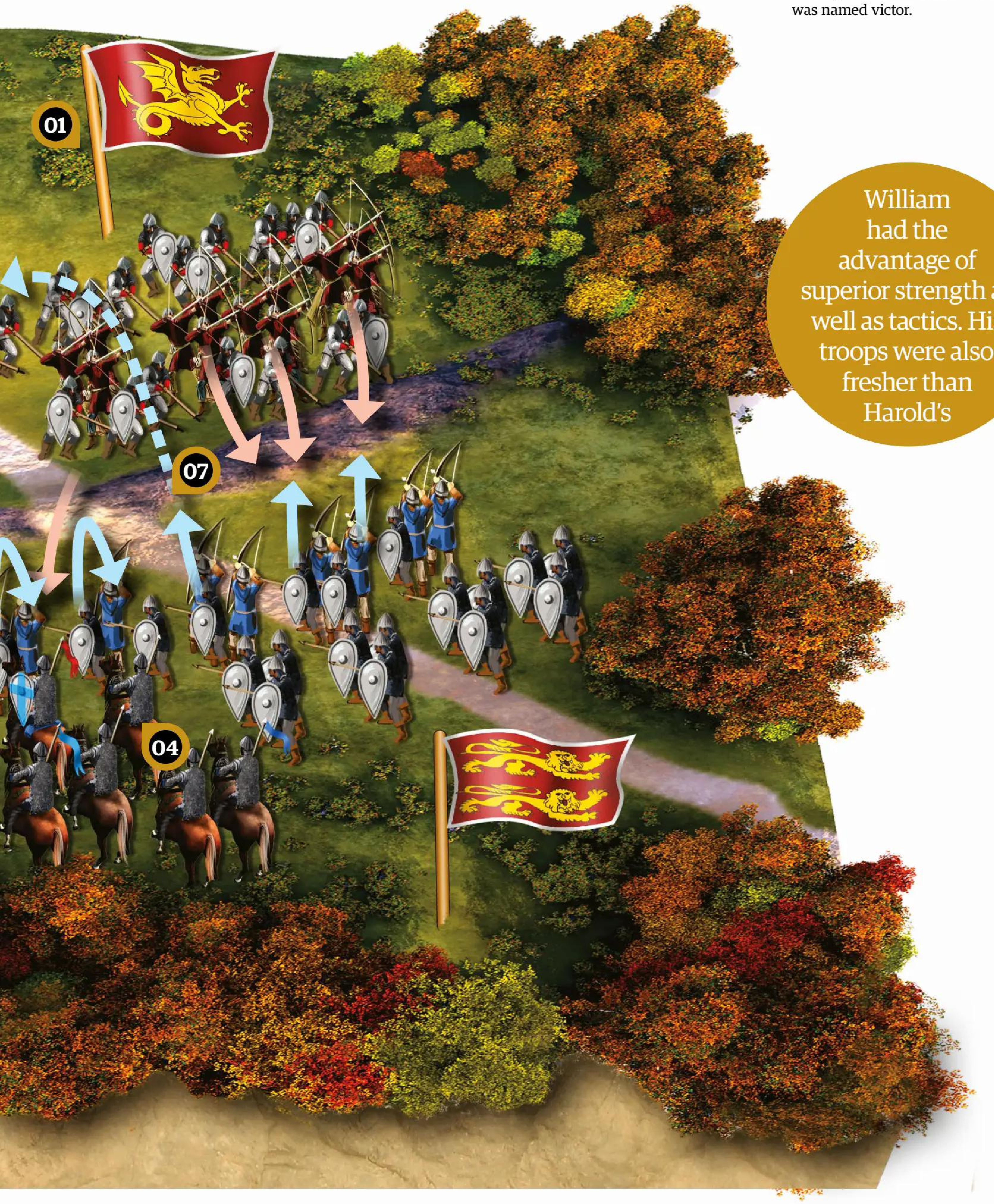
With the Norman-French infantry now engaged with the Anglo-Saxons, William ordered some of his cavalry units to bolster them from the rear, but after over an hour of fighting the shield wall remained intact. Disastrously for William, the left flank of his forces was broken by the Anglo-Saxons. At the same time, a rumour spread that William had been killed. To quash this the Duke removed his helmet and raced across the battlefield to intercept the Anglo-Saxons.

6 Feigned flight

Around 1pm, the Anglo-Saxon shield wall still held. William ordered his forces to retreat and regroup. After a brief hiatus William decided to switch tactics, employing his cavalry to initiate a series of feigned flight assaults.

10 Anglo-Saxons flee

The news quickly travels that Harold has been killed and the Anglo-Saxon army began to disintegrate. William's forces pursued them, while William was named victor.



> William had the advantage of superior strength as well as tactics. His troops were also fresher than Harold's

7 Shield wall breaks

The tactic worked, drawing Anglo-Saxons out of the shield wall and down the hill. This forced the wall to contract, reducing its width and finally exposing Harold and his few elite cavalry units. The portion of the Anglo-Saxon shield wall that had pursued the Norman-French cavalry was surrounded and killed.

8 Harold's infantry outflanked

The contracting shield wall made outflanking Harold easier. William instructed his remaining cavalry to attack the wall on both sides.

Norman-French

Troops
10,000
Cavalry
Unknown

GVLIELMVS · CONQVESTOR

Duke William II
Leader

A physically strong leader who was well known for his excellent riding skills, Duke William was a solid all-round leader. His ability to alter his tactics on the fly and improvise was crucial.

Strengths A physically impressive leader with excellent horsemanship and plenty of combat experience.

Weaknesses Relatively inexperienced in battle.

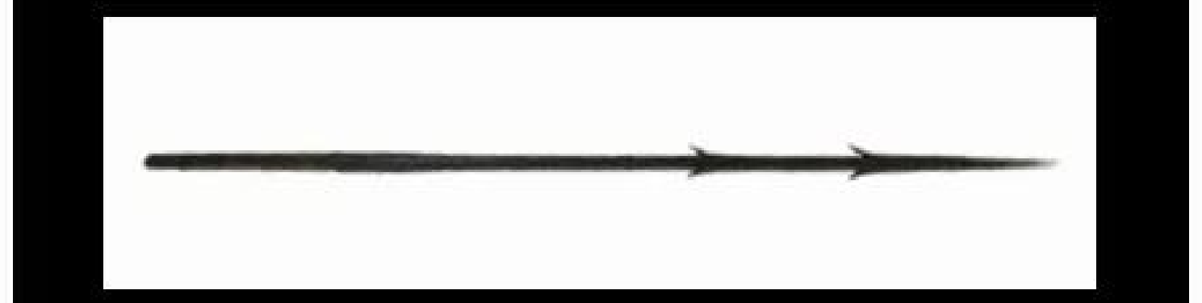
WILLELM: DVX INMAGNO:

Cavalry
Important Unit

Fast, agile and - in the Normans' case - incredibly well trained, the cavalry arguably won this battle.

Strengths A unit with excellent manoeuvrability and speed.

Weakness Vulnerable to spear/pike-wielding infantry as well as flanking archers.



Longspear
Key Weapon

An ancient weapon that was great for melee combat as well as short-ranged potential via throwing.

Strengths A versatile weapon that can be used in both hand-to-hand combat or as a missile.

Weaknesses Required years of training to use effectively.

© Look and Learn; Sayo Studio

Anglo-Saxon England's resistance war

Even though William defeated Harold Godwinson in battle on 14 October 1066, the king's death did not bring England under his control

Harold lay dead, his face so hacked that it was all but impossible to identify his body. Nearby lay his brothers, Gyrth and Leofwine. William, duke of Normandy, had laid waste the family that had dominated England through the last years of the childless King Edward the Confessor.

As the morning of 15 October 1066 dawned on the devastation around Senlac Hill, William knew that his all-or-nothing gamble, to bring Harold to battle and kill him, had paid off.

The duke – for he was still not king – withdrew to Hastings and, in the words of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, "...waited there to know whether the people would submit to him." But they didn't.

Yes, William had killed Harold, but killing a king didn't automatically make you king in his place; Anglo-Saxon rules of royal succession required the support of the Witenagemot, the assembly of a kingdom's leading men. While William had killed plenty of England's leading men at the Battle of Hastings, there were more than enough still alive to hail a different man as king.

Which they did. In London, which was teeming with armed men – both those who had escaped after the battle and others who had not made it to Hastings in time to take part – the earls Eadwine and Morcar, and the archbishops of Canterbury and York, declared the great-nephew of Edward the Confessor king. Edgar the Ætheling was about 15 and the last surviving male descendant of Alfred the Great. Of all the claimants to England's throne, he had by far the most convincing case. But Harold, the most powerful man in the country, had muscled the young Edgar out of the way when the Confessor died, making him the first earl of Oxford as a sop.

However, William, convinced of the right of his cause, was not going to wait forever for the English to come and give him the crown. "When he found that they would not come to him," William went to them, in blood and fury. The first stop was Romney. This was unfortunate for the town as some of the Norman army had landed there by mistake and been killed. Leaving what remained of it behind, William continued east to Dover. There was no castle there – although there soon would be – but the natural geography of the site provided defenders with great advantages. However, William's implacable advance terrified the defenders into surrender, and soon after, the town burned. Having seen the strategic nature of the site for himself, William may have built the first version of Dover Castle during his stay.

Image: Chris Collingwood www.collingwoodhistoricart.com

"As the morning of 15 October 1066 dawned on the devastation around Senlac Hill, William knew that his all-or-nothing gamble had paid off"

A fierce battle rages between the Normans and last pockets of Anglo-Saxon resistance, c 1071

A silver coin depicting William the Conqueror. Putting his likeness on coinage would help extent his influence over Britain

© Saforrest

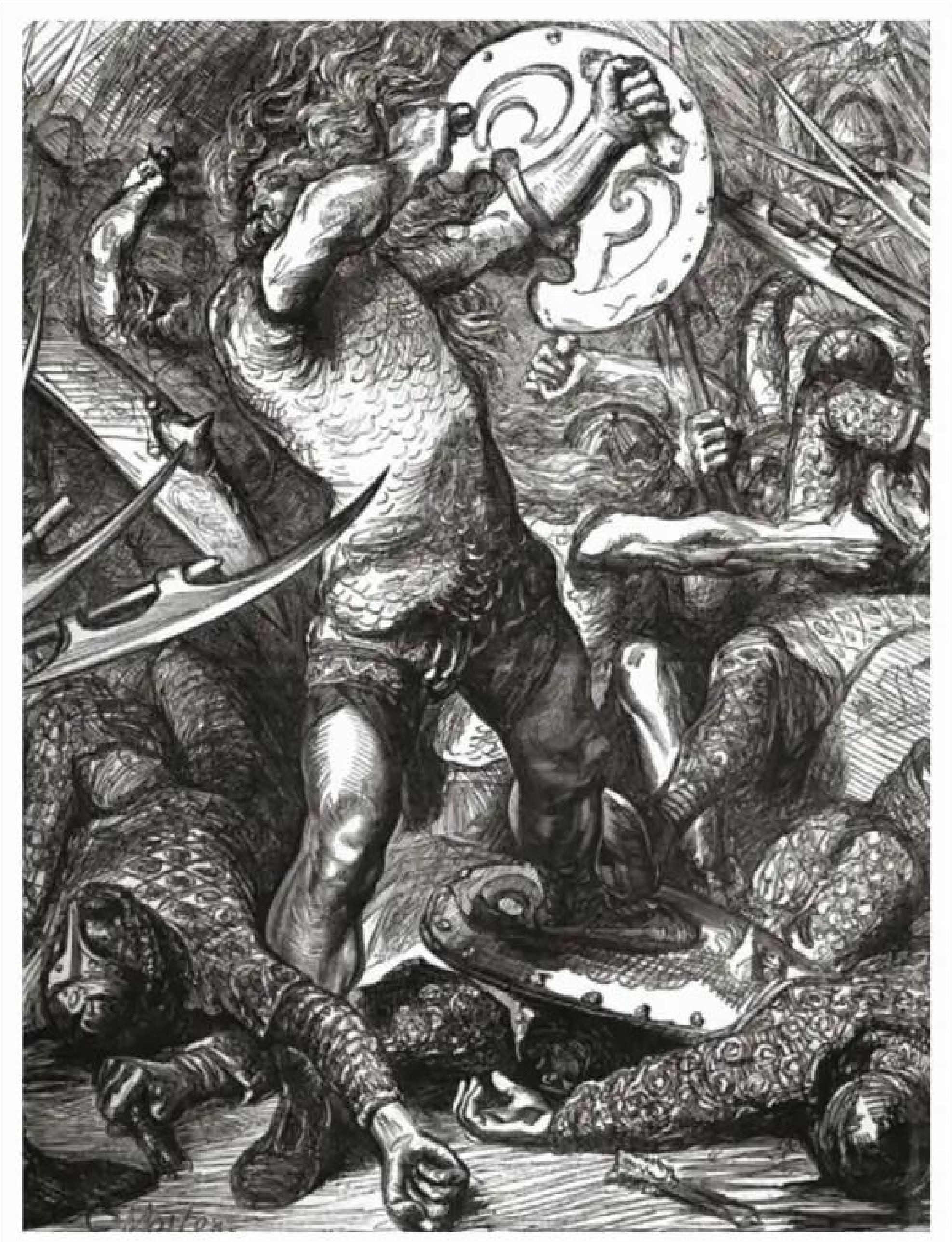
If he had not known it before, by now William knew that he had to take London to unlock the country. So, leaving a garrison in Dover to secure his rear, he advanced on the capital. The terrified inhabitants of the towns on the way came out to offer their submission. Their fear was realistic: the Normans were living off the land, which meant plundering the villages and towns on their way.

London, though, was different. Safe on the far bank of the Thames, its defenders even had the courage to sortie across London Bridge – one of the many early incarnations before the most enduring version was built in stone at the end of the 12th century. Although the sortie was unsuccessful, the Normans could not take the bridge or cross the river. Safe across the water and behind the city's walls, the young Edgar still ruled as king of England, now a month after the battle. William had received the submission of only those parts of the country he had directly terrorised.

Hereward the Wake

One of the most famous men who resisted the Conquest is also, sadly, the worst attested historically

Hereward's later fame relies upon stories written a considerable time after the events, with much mingling of legend with the history. What we can say is that Hereward, along with his followers, sacked Peterborough Abbey, ostensibly to save its valuables from the Normans. In 1071, Hereward joined the final spasm of English resistance, led by Morcar. The Earl of Northumbria had taken no part in the rebellions of the previous year but now, with his power greatly reduced, he attempted to make a stand on the Isle of Ely, amid the bogs of Fenland. The accounts vary, but William somehow brought the siege to an end, capturing Morcar and imprisoning him for the rest of his life. Hereward himself escaped the fall of Ely, disappearing into legend.



Hereward's epithet, first recorded in the late-14th century, might mean 'the watchful'

Faced with this refusal to acknowledge him, William set out on a path of terror. With an amphibious assault out of the question, the Normans switched from foraging to full-on destruction. They swung west, across Hampshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire, before coming to Wallingford, where the Thames could be safely forded. William's army now approached the capital from the north-west, burning through Middlesex and Hertfordshire on his way. He had learned these tactics in the long and bitter struggle for control of his own duchy, and now turned his battle-hardened army loose on a new country.

In London, the 15-year-old king was unable to galvanise resistance. Perhaps if Eadwine and Morcar, earls of Mercia and Northumbria, had supported him wholeheartedly, Edgar might have inspired the people to endure the oncoming siege. But, as news of William's advance reached London, support dropped away from the young king. Eadwine and Morcar withdrew, taking their men with them. With the men who had acclaimed him king deserting, Edgar must have felt he had little hope, and as news of William's advance reached the city, panic and hopelessness spread.

In the end, Edgar had no choice. As the year drew down into darkness, the young king rode out of London with a retinue of bishops and magnates and, presenting himself to William at Berkhamstead, laid the throne of England before the duke.

While that might have been enough for the English, for the Normans, William was not king until he was crowned. So, on Christmas Day 1066, William entered the great abbey church, to be anointed and crowned king – leaving men-at-arms outside to keep guard. At least, they were supposed to be on guard. When the archbishop asked the congregation in Westminster Abbey to acclaim William as king, the guards supposedly thought the great shout from within meant their leader was being attacked, so they set fire to the houses nearby. Pretty useless guards then: king betrayed and they stay outside.

No, the guards must have thought they could take advantage of the coronation to continue what they had been doing for the last month: pillaging. The *Chronicle* reads: "The flames quickly spreading, the people in the church were seized with panic in the midst of their rejoicings, and crowds of men and women, of all ranks and conditions, eagerly struggled to make their escape from the church." William was crowned king in an all-but-empty church while outside the flames raged and people fought. It was to be an all too apt start to his reign.

Now king, William set about distributing the spoils. The land of those who died at Hastings, William regarded as forfeit to him. As Harold and his brothers had owned huge amounts of the country, there was plenty to go around. The two earls, Eadwine and Morcar, who had supported

The war against William

The guerrilla war against the conquest lasted for five years and left much of the country, particularly in the north, devastated. This is where it happened

1 Gytha, mother of Harold Godwinson, leads Exeter in rebellion, while waiting for Harold's sons to arrive with mercenaries from Ireland. William besieges the city and, after a bitter fight, it surrenders, but not before Gytha makes her escape.

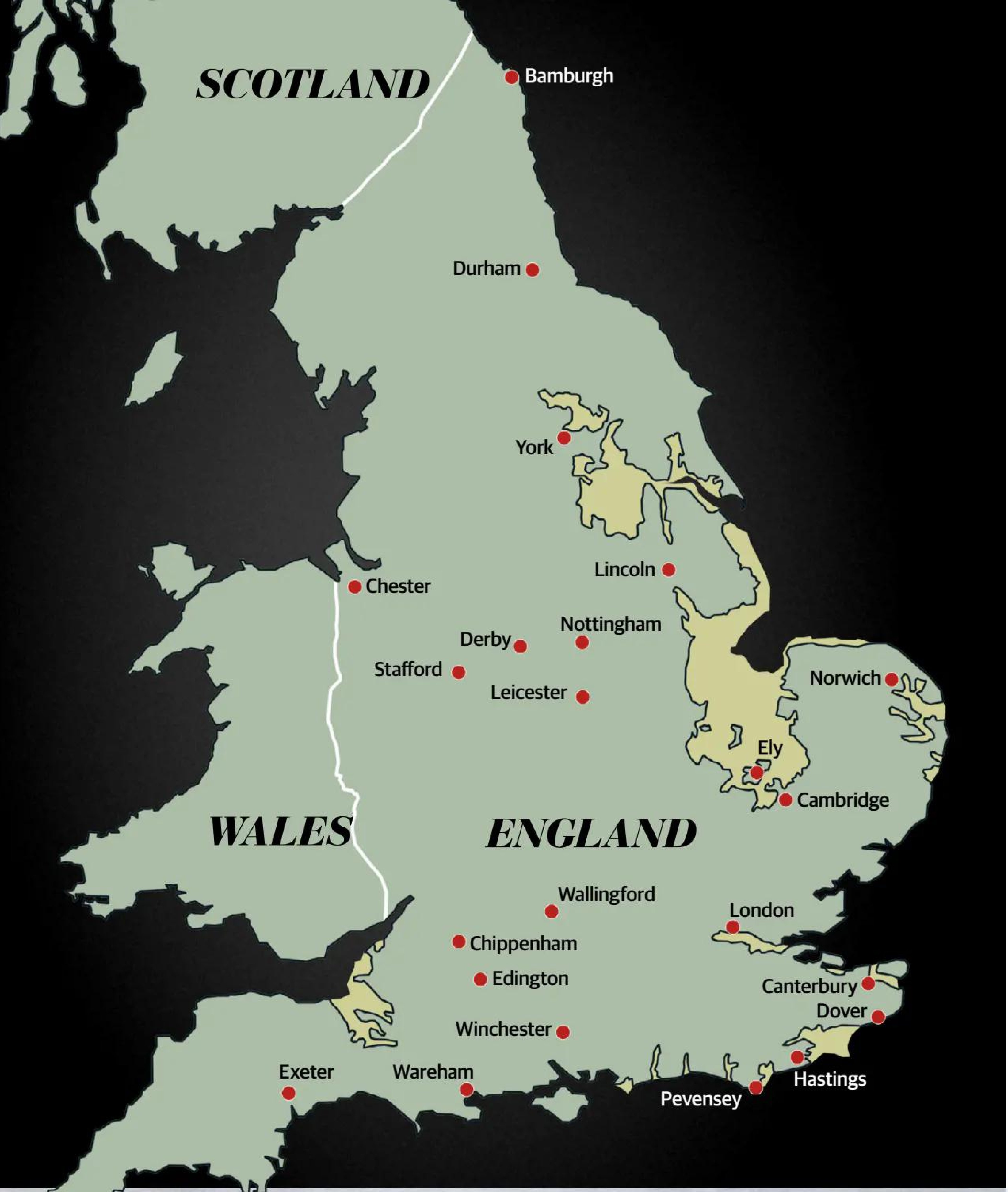
2 The first major rebellion takes place with Edgar the Ætheling as its figurehead with support from the Earls of Mercia and Northumbria. William's army devastates the region. The rebellion is rapidly crushed but its leaders escape.

3 Robert Cumin, appointed earl of Northumbria by William, is killed, along with hundreds of his men in Durham. The north revolts and takes York, but William, arriving at speed, puts the rebels to flight. They take refuge in the marshlands to the east.

4 Further rebellions break out. William harries the land and defeats the rebels outside Stafford.

5 The Harrying of the North. Having bought off the Danes, William sets his army to devastate the entire region.

6 The final spasm of Anglo-Saxon resistance, led by Hereward the Wake, gradually sputters into nothing.


SCOTLAND
Bamburgh
Durham
York
Chester
Lincoln
Nottingham
Derby
Stafford
Leicester
Norwich
Ely
Cambridge
WALES
ENGLAND
Wallingford
London
Chippenham
Edington
Canterbury
Dover
Winchester
Exeter
Wareham
Hastings
Pevensey

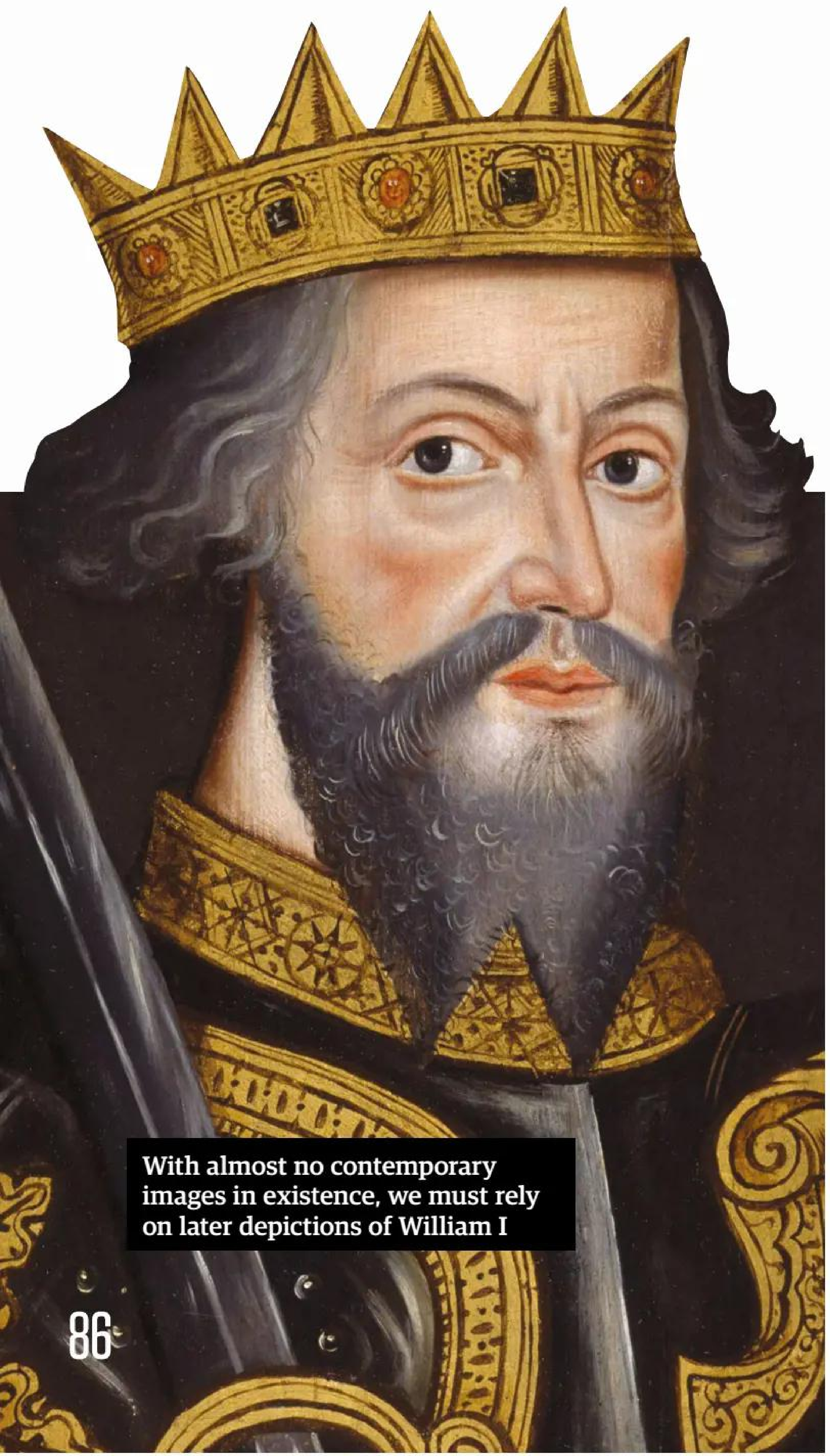
Even after their victory at Hastings, the Normans still had to fight to tighten their grip on the British isles

© Getty

Edgar, appeared before William to swear him fealty. The country seemed secure. Leaving his chief lieutenants as regents, William returned to Normandy six months after he had arrived, taking Edgar the Ætheling, Stigand, the archbishop of Canterbury, and earls Eadwine and Morcar with him. Although the king was stepping back into his dukedom, he was taking hostages with him.

Back in England, William's regents were taking precautions of a kind entirely new to the English: castles. Although Alfred had established burhs, fortified towns, as part of his defence plan against the Vikings, castles as strong points to defend and dominate the surrounding country were unknown. The magnates William had left in charge set to with a will, pressing the populace to erect the buildings of their domination, while looking the other way as their men continued to plunder and pillage. It was not the recipe for peace.

The first to shake off the torpor of defeat was the aptly named Eadric the Wild, who ravaged Herefordshire in the summer of 1067, defeating Norman patrols but, despite besieging it, he was unable to take Hereford Castle. With the English earls taken hostage, it was up to the lower levels of English society to act. Next up, the men of Kent. With the brand new Dover Castle rising from its headland, they had an obvious target, but not the means to take it. However, there were others regarding this land with envious eyes: Eustace, count of Boulogne. Not an obvious choice of ally, given that he'd fought alongside William at Hastings, but the count had fallen out with the duke over the division of the spoils. Landing at Dover, he laid siege to the castle, but the Norman defenders held out, in fact, they did more than hold out: they sallied forth before more English rebels could assemble and put Eustace's men to flight. The count himself made it back to his boats but many of his men did not.



With almost no contemporary images in existence, we must rely on later depictions of William I

Northumbria – that is, the old kingdom, the land north of the Humber – would provide the greatest resistance and suffer the worst retribution in the struggle against the Normans. The first inkling was when the (English) lord given charge of the lands north of the Tyne by William, a thegn called Copsig, was killed by the man whose land it had been previously, Oswulf. Oswulf beheaded Copsig himself. However, before he could become a focus for resistance, he was killed by a robber.

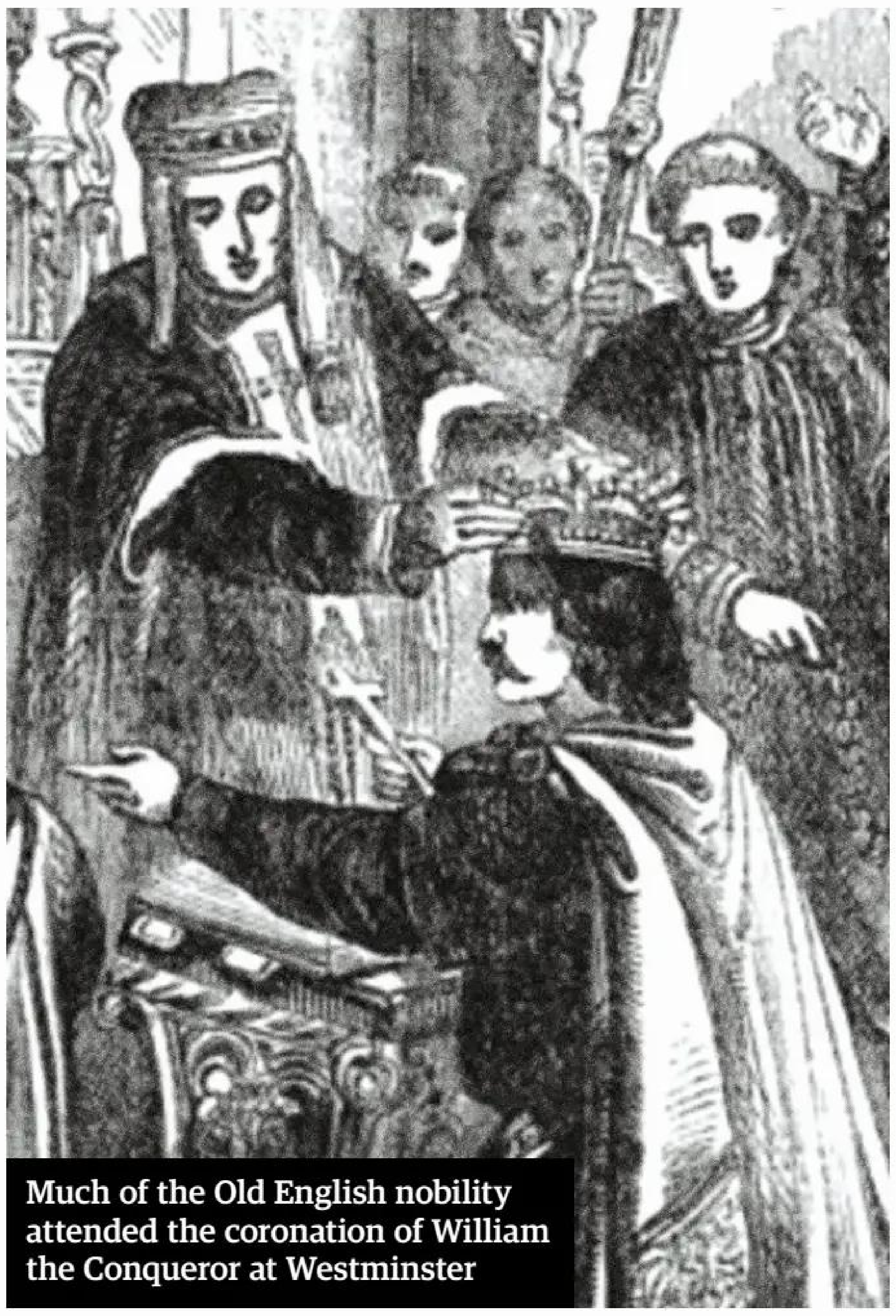
These though, were small-scale affairs. It would take something more serious to bring William scurrying back over the Channel: like a conspiracy by the surviving Godwinsons, led by Harold's mother, Gytha. Making her base in the walled city of Exeter, Gytha sent messages to other English towns to rise up against the conqueror, while other feelers were sent to her contacts at the Danish court and Harold's sons by his first wife, Edith Swan-Neck, attempted to raise an army in Ireland.

From London, where he had spent Christmas of 1067, William marched southwest, summoning his new English subjects to fight alongside him. But, approaching Exeter, it seemed the rebellion had again fizzled out: the leading citizens of the city came to meet the conqueror and swear obedience, giving him hostages as a mark of their good faith.

But going back to the city, they closed the gates of Exeter against William. Maybe they were playing for time, hoping to delay the king so that reinforcements could arrive from elsewhere. To persuade them to open the gates, William had one of the hostages blinded in view of the men manning the city's ramparts; according to a chronicler, one defender gave answer by farting. The ensuing siege was bitterly fought, but after 18 days, the city asked for terms.

The English chroniclers state that Exeter surrendered because Gytha, along with her followers, escaped from the besieged town, leaving the citizens hoping for William's mercy. Perhaps surprisingly, William gave it, although somewhat less surprisingly, his men were not quite so merciful. Still, the city was not razed.

With the rising quelled, William brought his wife, Matilda, over from Normandy and, on Whitsun, she was crowned queen at Westminster. Both English and Norman lords were in attendance at the coronation. It seemed that William was on his way to establishing the sort of hybrid aristocracy that, a generation before, Cnut had made following his conquest of England.



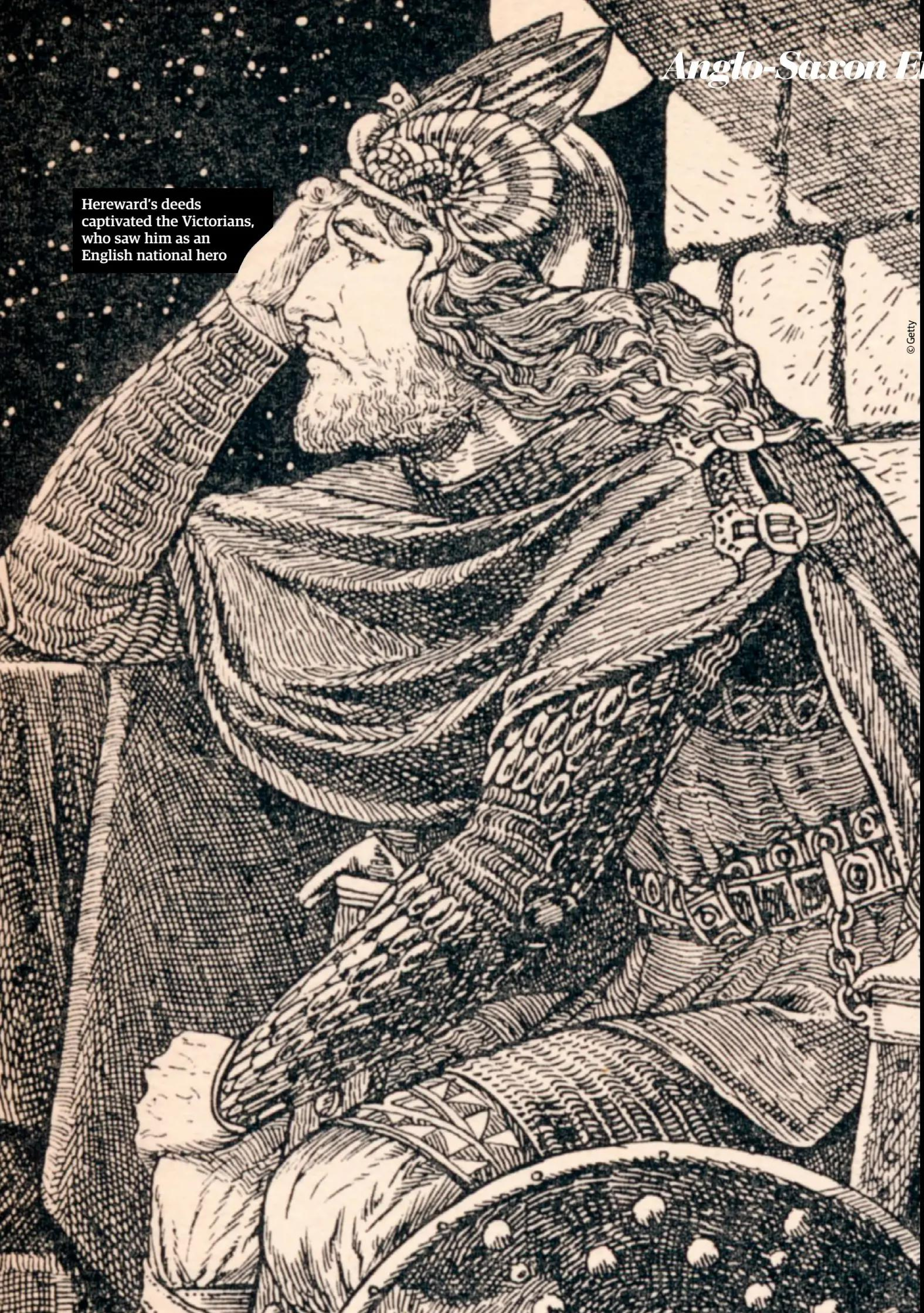
Much of the Old English nobility attended the coronation of William the Conqueror at Westminster

Resentment, in particular over land appropriations, was growing. Earls Eadwine and Morcar, seeing their lands whittled away, rebelled and, with such support, others rallied to their cause. Most notably Edgar the Ætheling, who had evidently returned to England with William, had been able to make a getaway from his status as enforced royal houseguest, and joined the earls. "Then it was told the king, that the people in the north had gathered themselves together, and would stand against him if he came," the *Chronicle* reads.

William did indeed arrive, in the manner accustomed. Faced with open rebellion, led by the two most powerful English earls and with Edgar as its figurehead, William unleashed his army. The *Chronicle* records that William marched from Nottingham, to York, to Lincoln, and throughout the region. The speed with which the rebellion folded gives some indication of the devastation the Norman war machine left in its wake. But most devastating of all, for English morale at least, were the castles. William planted them in the wake of his army and the English had no answer. One chronicler explained: "In the English districts there were very few fortresses... so that, though the English were warlike and brave, they were little able to make a determined resistance."

With the rebellion failing, earls Eadwine and Morcar again submitted to William while Edgar

"William had one of the hostages blinded in view of the men; one defender gave answer by farting"



Hereward's deeds captivated the Victorians, who saw him as an English national hero

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The end of the Anglo-Saxons?

Under William's rule, Old English customs were almost entirely lost in favour of Norman ones

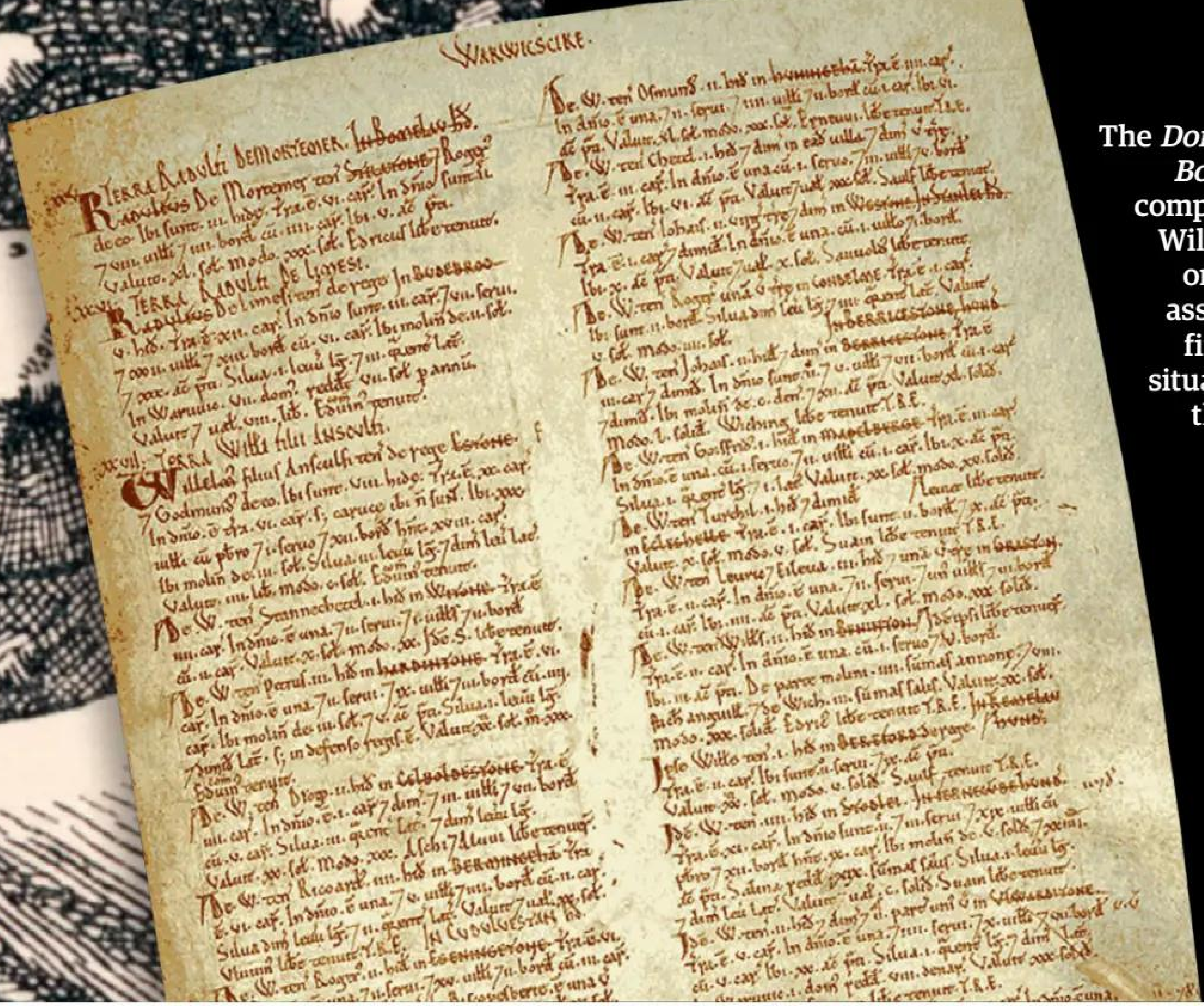
The *Domesday Book*, William's inventory of the country, shows that by 1086, Englishmen owned only five per cent of the country, and this proportion reduced further in the following decades. William of Malmesbury, writing in the early 12th century, said: "England has become the dwelling place of foreigners and a playground for lords of alien blood. No Englishman today is an earl, a bishop or an abbot."

Those who had survived the invasion, and the subsequent rebellions, went abroad, seeking out sanctuary in Scotland, Scandinavia, Ireland and further afield, sometimes much further afield to places like Byzantium. Emigrating Englishmen found employment with the emperor's elite Varangian Guard, so much so that what was previously a Scandinavian unit became known as a largely Anglo-Saxon one.

They left behind a land where the language of the elite had changed too: Latin and French were spoken in William's court and this continued through the reign of his son and heir, William Rufus. However, when Rufus was killed by a misshot arrow while hunting in his father's New Forest (William had lost his second son, Richard, to another hunting accident in the forest some 30 years earlier), his younger brother, Henry I, began a revival in English and English customs that might have led to early reconciliation if it was not for his lack of a male heir. Henry designated his daughter, Matilda, as ruler but Stephen, William's grandson, wanted the crown for himself. The ensuing 20-year civil war caused such destruction that it was called the Anarchy and, the *Chronicle* lamented: "Christ and his saints slept."

At the more local level, contact between the 8,000 or so Norman settlers and the native English slowly improved. Intermarriage had become common by the early 12th century. While there were no English abbots, Englishmen served as priors in monasteries and monks worked, particularly through written histories, to improve relations between the two peoples. When the Anarchy ended and Henry II ascended the throne at the end of 1154, things had changed. A century after Hastings, English had become the national language again, although the Old English names were largely lost. The English were now a race of Bobs and Johns, rather than Æthelwins and Æthelwalds.

By 1170, Richard fitz Nigel could write: "In the present day, the races have become so fused that it can scarcely be discerned who is English and who is Norman." The conquerors had, in the end, been conquered themselves.



The *Domesday Book* was complied on William I's orders to assess the financial situation of the land fled north, seeking sanctuary from King Malcolm of Scotland. A notable, and surprising, feature of William's character is the mercy he showed his foes once they submitted to him - even after repeated acts of rebellion.

But with William busy in the north, Harold's sons, who had been busy raising men in Ireland, saw a chance to act. They landed in Somerset and attempted to take Bristol, but failed in the face of determined local opposition. They continued raiding until Eadnoth, a local thegn and, by his name an English one too, met them in battle. Eadnoth was killed, but Harold's boys suffered great losses too. They withdrew back to Ireland, raiding as they went. If they hoped to raise their countrymen, they had failed. Indeed, their tactics suggested they were more concerned with paying off the men they had hired than raising the country against William.

The greatest threat to William's rule was still to come. Concerned about his lack of control in the north, William gave the rule of the lands north of the Tyne to a man named Robert Cumin. Seeking to ingratiate himself in the Norman manner, Robert ravaged his way north, stopping in Durham and lodging with the bishop. At dawn on 31 January 1069, the desperate Northumbrians broke into the city. Robert made a stand against the attackers in the bishop's house, but the rebels set it aflame, cutting down all of those who tried to escape.

As news of Robert's death spread, revolts broke out throughout the land. The governor of York castle, caught outside its walls, was killed, although the castle held out against the rebels. "But King William came from the South, unawares on them, with a large army, and put them to flight, and slew on the spot those who could not escape; which were many hundred men; and plundered the town."

"William sent his men into the country around York with orders to lay everything to waste"

However, many escaped, disappearing into the marshes and meres that surrounded low-lying York. When William went back south, the castles in York were attacked again. Meanwhile, the sons of Harold tried once more, landing near Barnstaple in mid-summer with 60-odd shiploads of men. Although they were defeated, it was at a high cost, and it all added to the sense of crisis gripping the country.

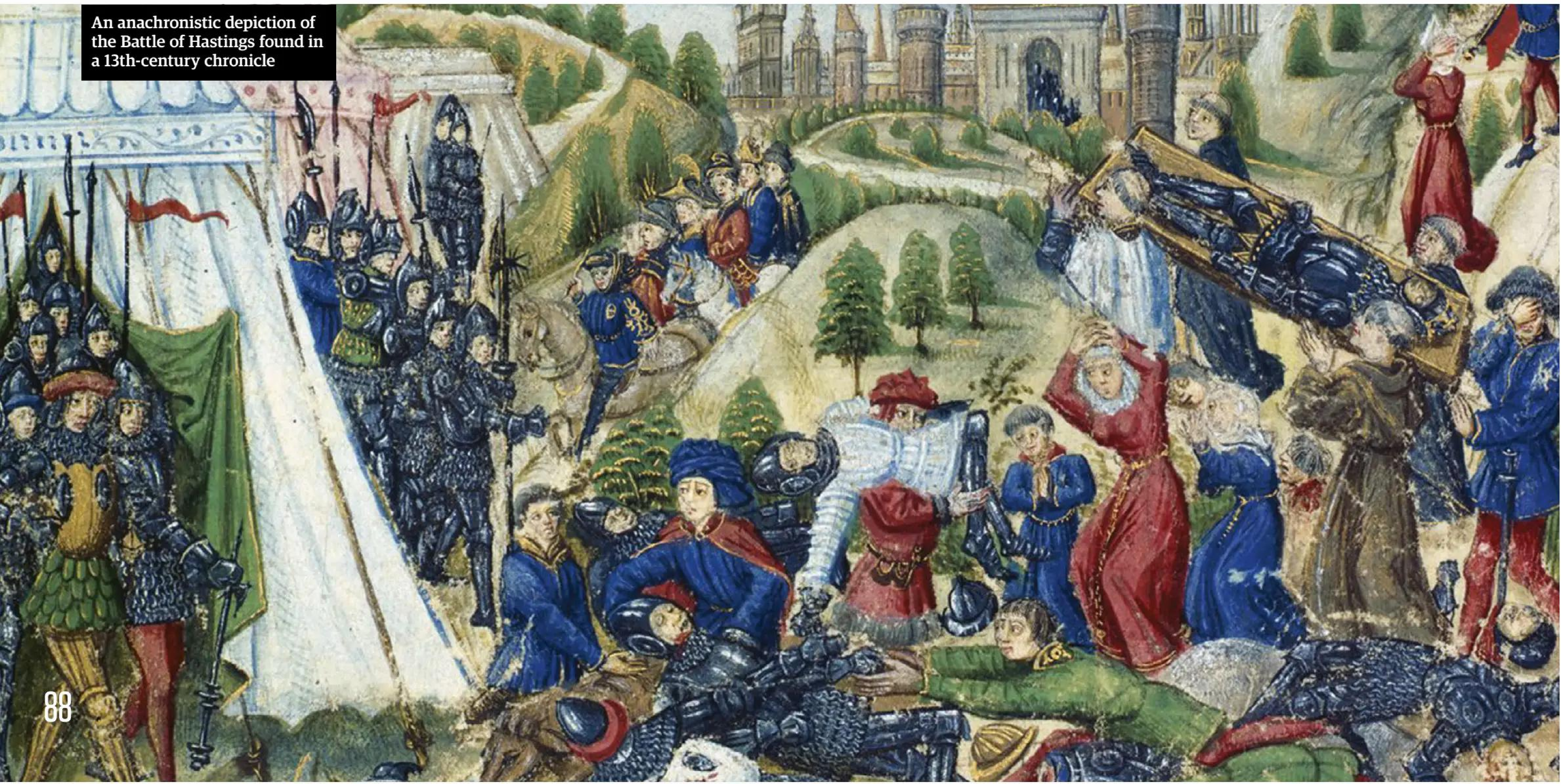
Worse was to follow. News of the repeated English uprisings had crossed the North Sea and reached the ears of King Sweyn Estridsson of Denmark, nephew of Cnut. Following his uncle's example, Sweyn raised a fleet and, late in the summer of 1069, sent it to England, where it was met in the Humber estuary by Edgar and the northern English lords. Although Sweyn had not come himself - giving command of his fleet to his brother, Asbjorn - it must have seemed to the rebels that Norman rule would soon be brought to an end; and even more so when the panicking garrison of York sallied out to meet the Anglo-Danish army and was destroyed.

But when William came north, he found the Danes employing old Viking tactics: they had gone. Instead, they made camp on the Isle of Axholme, amid the impenetrable bogs and marshes of Lincolnshire. But as William attempted to engage with this army, news came to him of attacks all over the country: at Montacute, Exeter and Shrewsbury. William sent lieutenants to try to deal with the rebellions but the rebels withdrew into wildernesses at the Norman approach, only to re-emerge once they had gone. It took William himself to bring some of them to battle at Stafford, where he defeated them.

On his return north, William found the Danes had again departed. It was like fighting fog, so William chose another strategy: gold. He bought Asbjorn off and gave him leave to raid the coast so long as he went home at the end of winter.

With the Danes out of the way, William turned his cold gaze on the lands around York. While he had bought off Asbjorn for now, William knew that paying the Dane meant that he would return. But William was determined that, when he did, Asbjorn would find no one and nothing waiting for him.

Thus began the Harrying of the North. William sent his men into the country with orders to lay everything to waste. This is why to this day, throughout Yorkshire, William is still called the Bastard. According to one chronicler, more than 100,000 people died of starvation. The survivors resorted to eating the dead, or selling themselves into slavery. The monks of Evesham Abbey in Worcestershire remembered with horror how starving refugees would stagger into the abbey but, given food, died from eating it, their emaciated bodies unable to cope. With the north decimated, William spent the first few months of 1070 finishing off the rebels in Mercia. By March, it was all over. The last serious resistance had been crushed. William had, finally, conquered.


An anachronistic depiction of the Battle of Hastings found in a 13th-century chronicle

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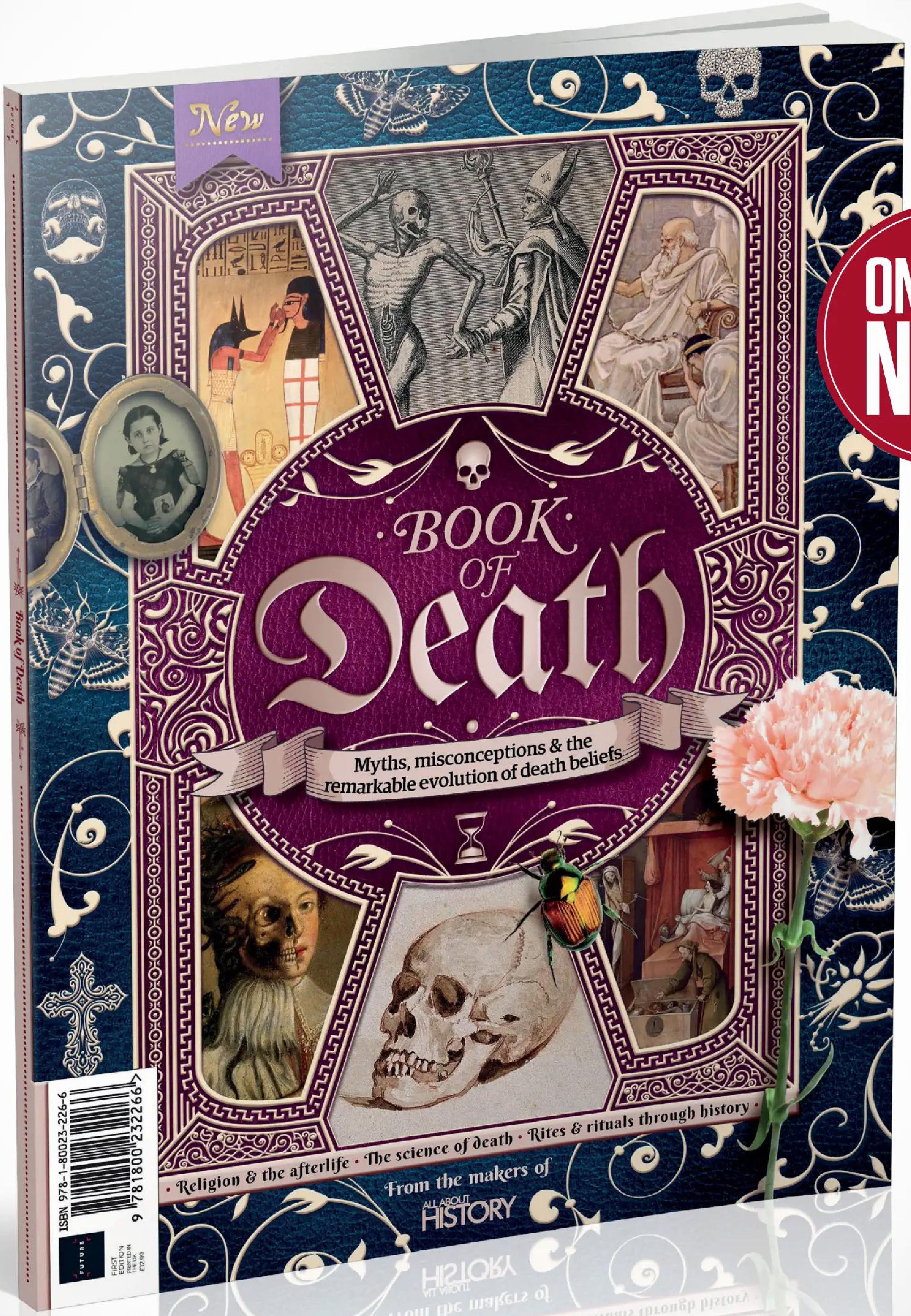
MYTHS, MISCONCEPTIONS AND THE REMARKABLE EVOLUTION OF DEATH BELIEFS

Trace the extraordinary history of death, from the Ancient Egyptians to the American Civil War, and find out how science can help us to understand and demystify our fate.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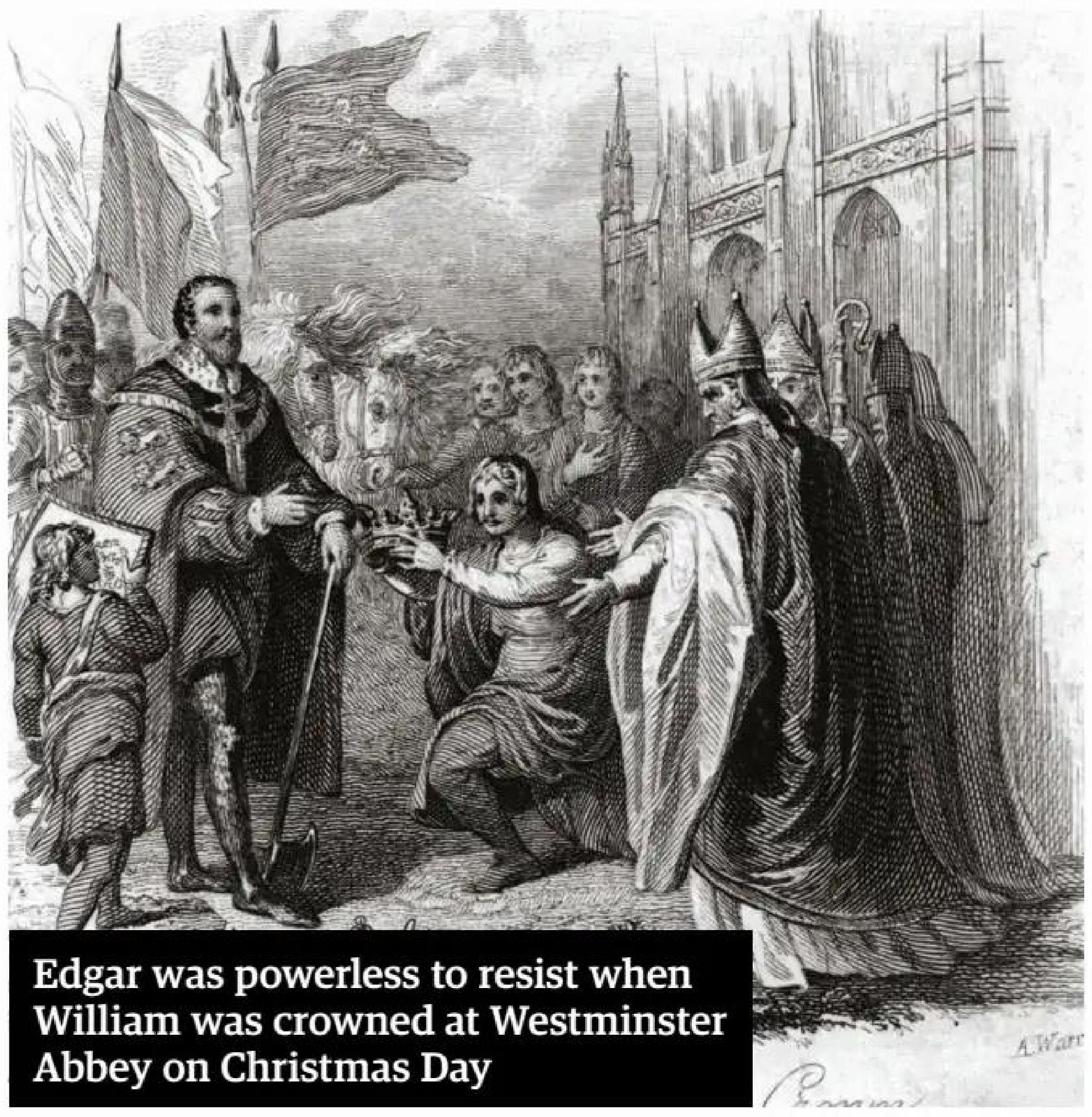
Edgar Ætheling

Harold Godwinson is dead, his forces now scattered and leaderless. As the king passed away, the future of Saxon England now lay with a little-known teenager

As Harold lay dying on the battlefield, the Royal House of Wessex was nearing its final page. With the Saxon army in disarray and the Norse having retreated back to Scandinavia, William had the upper hand in the race for the English throne. Only one person stood in the Conqueror's way, a little known Ætheling or Anglo-Saxon prince by the name of Edgar. The boy wasn't the ideal choice for king but he was the only male with the blood to continue the Saxon line. His royal heritage came from his grandfather, former Saxon king Edmund II, commonly called Edmund Ironside. Edgar's father was known as Edward the Exile and he never became king after leaving the country when Edmund was defeated by the Danish King Cnut. Edgar was born in Hungary during his father's exile and the family later returned to England in 1057 during the reign of Edward the Confessor. Edgar's father was requested by the king to return to be his successor but he died in August shortly after their arrival. The grief-stricken family were then taken in to the King's royal court.


Edgar was powerless to resist when William was crowned at Westminster Abbey on Christmas Day

Edward the Confessor died in January 1066 and a succession crisis gripped England. With no direct heir, Edgar was the next in line to be king, but he was considered too young. Instead the King's brother-in-law and decorated soldier Harold Godwinson took the throne as Harold II. The news of Harold's death at Hastings reached the ruling classes or Witenagemot in London soon after the battle's end. The decision was taken to install Edgar as the King of England. It was a gamble, but there was no other option if the Saxon line was to be maintained. The rightful heir to Edward the Confessor finally had the crown but with William on the march and the Vikings still a threat, for how long?

Edgar had two sisters: Margaret was Queen Consort of Scotland, while Christina was the head of an abbey

Edgar was never officially crowned as king. Instead a regency council was hurriedly formed in London that would rule in his name. Plans were afoot to raise a second army that would do what Harold failed to do, kill William and run the Normans from English lands. Edgar's supporters planned to use the still strong English navy to cut off Norman support from France, but with so many nobles falling at Hastings, there were very few left with the power to carry out these plans. William endured very little if any resistance from Hastings through to London but Edgar and his followers did muster enough support to make a stand on London Bridge. This was initially successful but the stubborn William was determined to take London. The Norman army ransacked areas of Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire eventually surrounding the city. The ferocity of the assault on the south-east shocked the Saxon nobility, who one by one submitted to William's rule. Stigand, the Archbishop of Canterbury, was one of Edgar's most powerful allies, but after the Norman show of intent even he now formally recognised Norman rule. Edgar attempted to flee the city but his party was apprehended in Berkhamstead, Hertfordshire as they tried to escape. After being brought back to London, the boy-king was forced to abdicate after reigning for only two months between October and December 1066. William kept a watchful eye over young Edgar and even planned to marry his older sister Margaret. It's not known what Edgar's role was in the new Norman administration. He was part of William's court for a period and *Domesday* records state that he owned two estates in Hertfordshire. By 1068 the former king had fled north with his family to Scotland but he would later return. He would lose the lands given to him by the surprisingly generous William, but he believed it was worth the risk. Rebellion was coming.

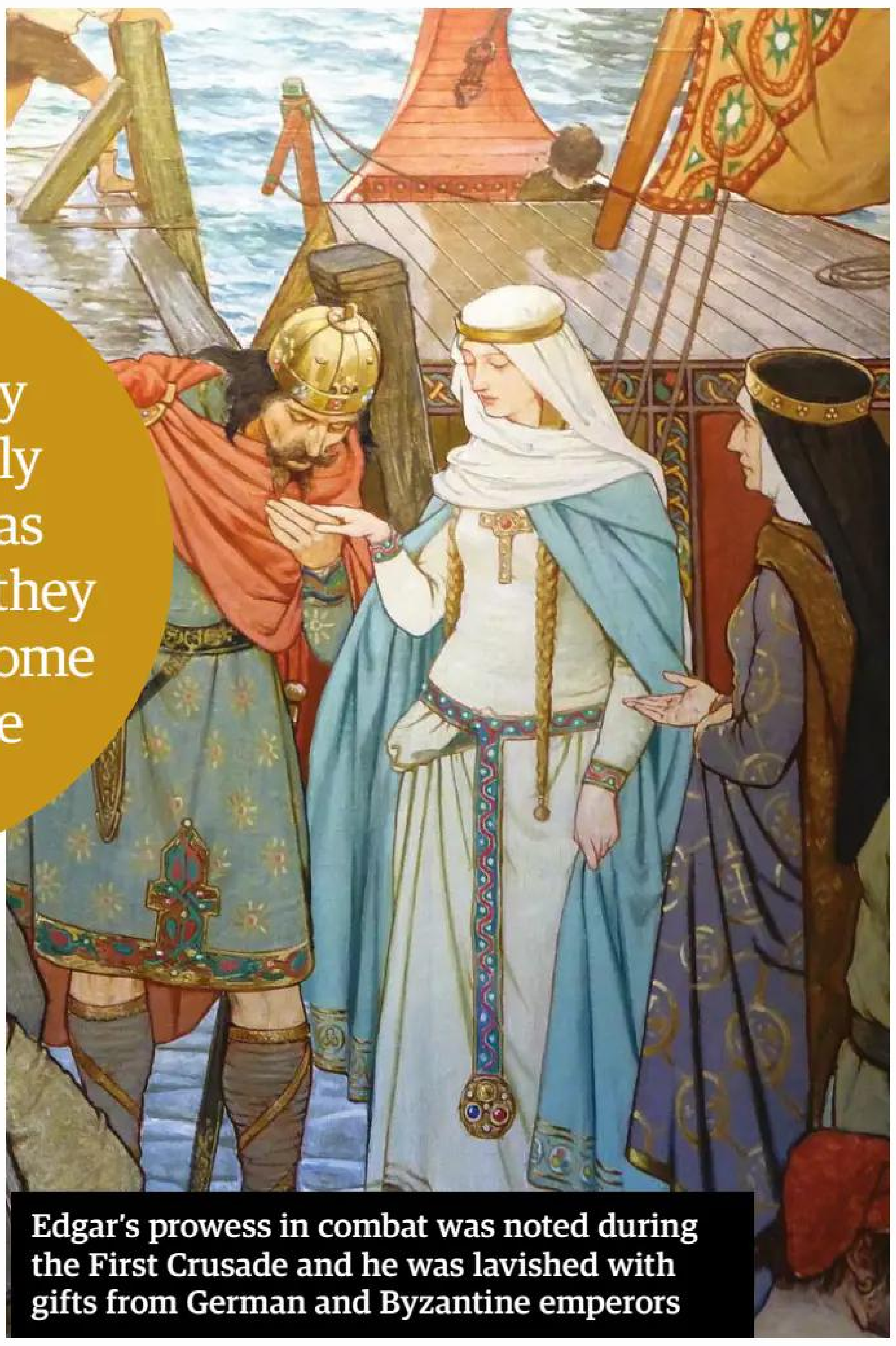
Edgar never realised his destiny as King of England but was often willing to support others who didn't approve of Norman hegemony. With London, Winchester and the majority of the South of England feeling the might of William's iron fist, he allied with Scottish King Malcolm III in an attempt to expel the Normans. He even managed to coerce the Danes into joining his cause, but after initial victories, William first paid off the Norsemen and then left no quarter, destroying all resistance in the Harrying of the North. Edgar fled to France after realising that he couldn't beat William and his life was still in danger. He had no option but to make peace with the House of Normandy and retired to relative obscurity in William's court. Restless after ten years under Norman rule, Edgar left to fight in the Holy Land at Antioch and Jerusalem during the First Crusade. He died in 1125, taking with him the last hope of an Anglo-Saxon king ever reclaiming the English throne.

Edgar never had any children, partly because he was frightened that they would soon become targets for the Normans

EDGAR ÆTHELING
c.1051-1125

Brief Bio

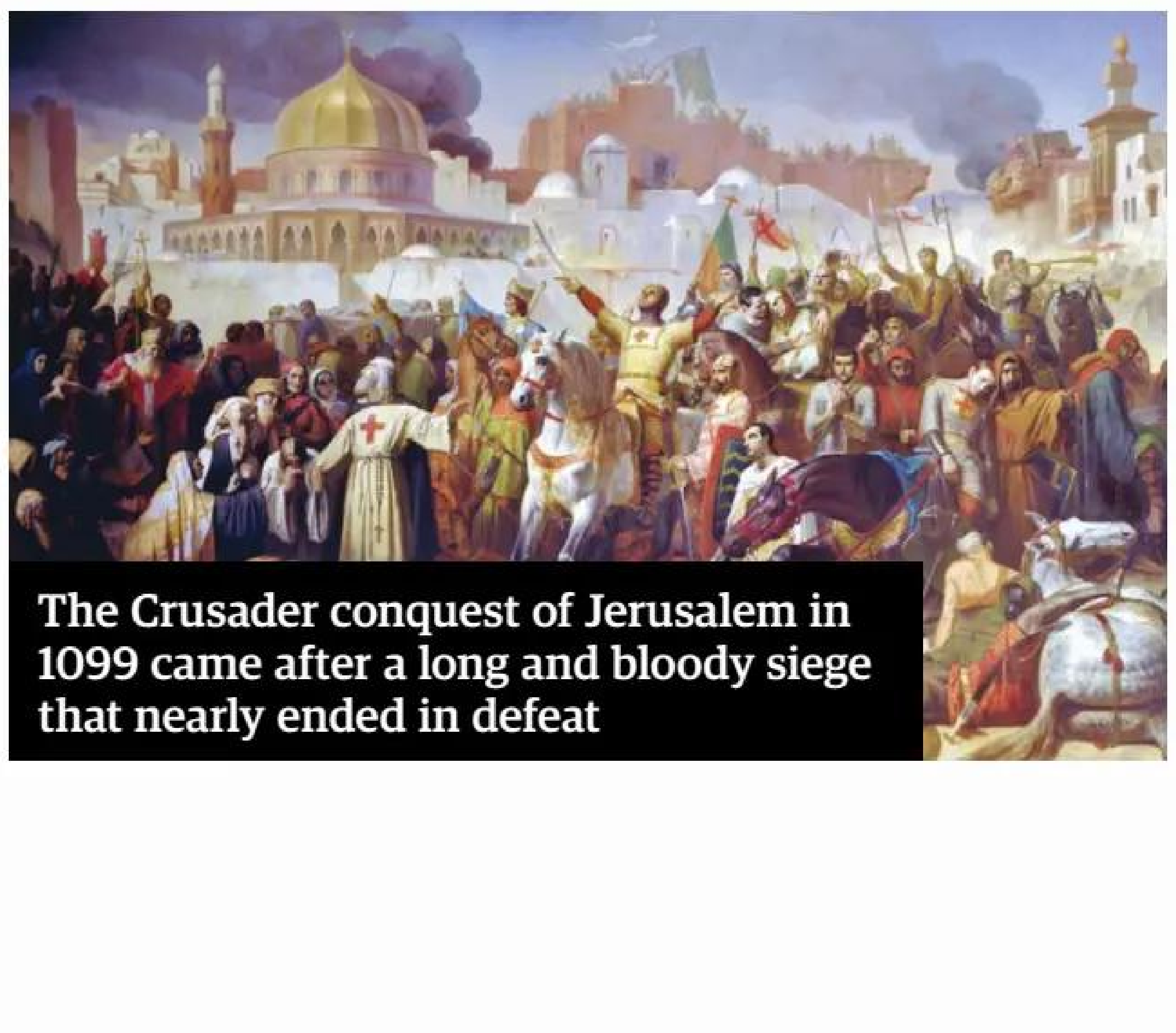
The Royal House of Wessex didn't end with the death of Harold Godwinson at Hastings. The line continued with the teenage Edgar Ætheling, the grandson of former Saxon king Edmund Ironside. Edgar represented the last in the line and now only he could stop the relentless Norman march to London.



Edgar's prowess in combat was noted during the First Crusade and he was lavished with gifts from German and Byzantine emperors

Edgar Ætheling: more than just an uncrowned king

The First Crusade was called in 1095 and many English Anglo-Normans answered Pope Urban II's plea to travel to the Holy Land. Among them was Edgar Ætheling, who was keen to fight after admitting defeat in retaking England. Edgar joined up with the Crusaders at Constantinople and was tasked with commanding an English fleet. His leadership was praised during the conflict, which was successful for the Crusaders as they conquered Jerusalem, establishing a new Christian kingdom in the process. So lauded was Edgar's contribution that he was lavished with gifts from both German and Byzantine emperors and even offered a place at both of their respective courts to which he politely declined. Instead, Edgar was intent on returning to England. He had fought alongside Robert II, Duke of Normandy during the Crusade and had allied with him. England was now under the leadership of Henry I and desired more land on the continent. Edgar and Robert fought Henry at the Battle of Tinchebray but were defeated and imprisoned. Edgar had been a headstrong campaigner all his life ever since he witnessed William's march to power in 1066. Conceding defeat was to be Edgar's final act and he retired to a life of obscurity in southern England, never to raise a sword again.



The Crusader conquest of Jerusalem in 1099 came after a long and bloody siege that nearly ended in defeat

VLIELMAS .
CONQIS

WILLIAM I

England's first Norman king

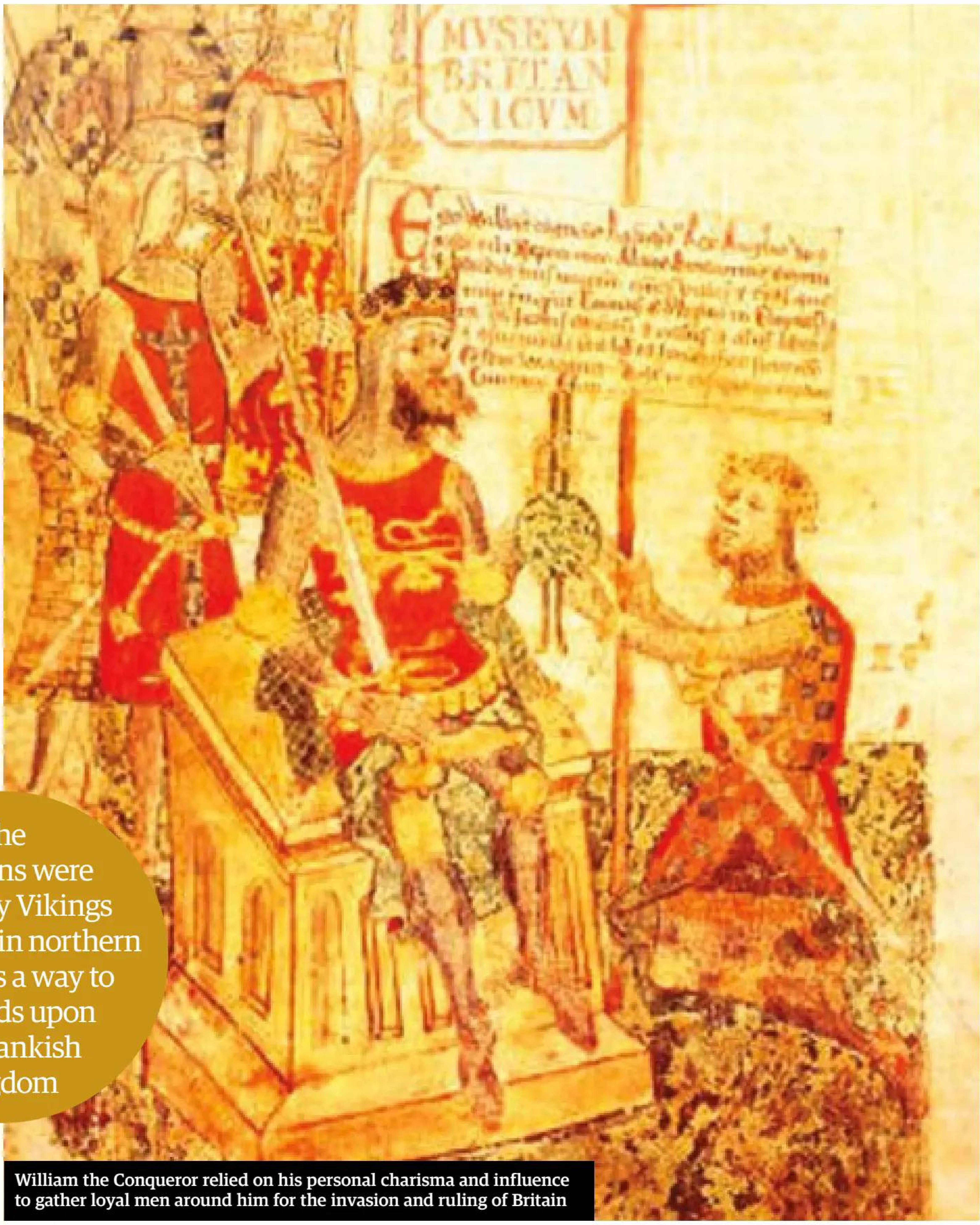
Facing powerful enemies and resistance at every turn, William the Conqueror stamped the British Isles into submission through a mixture of political and military power, paving the way for England to become a medieval powerhouse

As the dust settled on the field at Hastings, the elation felt by William the Conqueror must have been short-lived. He had won the battle and vanquished his most powerful rival for the English throne, but now he faced what must have been daunting task; the consolidation of his power and rule over England. Despite having gained military supremacy, he would have to contend with multiple uprisings throughout his reign. These would interfere with his most pressing task – securing the Duchy of Normandy against the French and other enemies. His belief in his birthright to rule England would push him to secure the kingdom but the vast majority of his time was spent on the continent.

It took ten weeks for William and his army to conquer England after Hastings, although it would take years of hard work and violence to totally subdue the country. William's power when he first came across the Channel was linked to his personal character, a trait that stemmed from his position as Duke of Normandy. In Normandy he did not rule by divine right or with a crown, but instead with martial prowess and political intrigue. This can be seen in how he raised his forces for the invasion. As Duke he was first among equals, not able to levy an army or raise his own taxes he relied on 'Joint Stock', an agreement where he would promise lands in England for all those willing to fight with him. This was an inviting proposal and after carrying the day at Hastings and being crowned in London, he set about keeping this obligation.

During William's reign, England experienced higher temperatures, which meant soil was fertile for years of good harvest

While the wholesale replacement of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy must have seemed cataclysmic at the time for those involved, it was a much more merciful move than they could have expected. In 1016 when King Cnut had seized the English crown, he had some of the elite massacred and replaced with his own Scandinavian followers. This mercy ensured that the Normans would not face a national rebellion and while they were plagued with uprisings in the early years of William's reign, these were all localised unrest. Much of them were started for personal gain, making William's position immediately stronger than would-be conquerors before him. It took six months until he felt secure enough to return to Normandy after the invasion and in the first years of his reign, William found it



William the Conqueror relied on his personal charisma and influence to gather loyal men around him for the invasion and ruling of Britain

The Normans were originally Vikings given land in northern France as a way to stop raids upon the Frankish kingdom

very difficult to personally be out of the country for any great length of time.

Living in England after the Norman invasion must have felt like a double-edged sword. On one hand many English towns suffered badly as a direct result of the conquest, with streets and buildings being demolished to make way for castles. It took several decades for them to recover. Despite this, urban centres continued to grow under Norman rule. Carrying on from the actions of earlier Anglo-Saxon kings, William and his Norman successors continued to found new towns and villages throughout England, helping stimulate economic growth. Over 150 new urban centres were established including Hull, Liverpool, King's Lynn and Newcastle (one of the most aptly named places to highlight the Norman's castle-building projects). The creation of a new town was no small feat and needed a significant capital investment to organise street planning, the setting up of market places and the establishment of a church. With trade being the lifeblood of a medieval town, the revenues gathered would fill the royal coffers, making urban growth very profitable for kings like William. Towns were used in the invasion and subjugation of Wales by William as a way to supply the castles constructed and ensure the loyalty of the local population. These towns often needed walls of their own and this meant that English traders could carry out their business knowing that the king had their well-being in mind. The population had grown after 1066, seeing towns more populated, even though roughly 80 per cent of the people still lived in the countryside.

William was lucky to inherit the English monetary system and throughout the land there were 40 towns where coins could be minted. With England being one of the only western countries to be minting its own coins, one of the kingdom's greatest assets was its national tax gathering system. With this level of control over the currency that would be minted, William was able to ensure that only his image would be found on English coins. This was a tactic that had been used for thousands of years and enabled William to project his power to every corner of the British Isles without much effort. In a time when the average inhabitant of England might only see the king a few times in their life, if at all, William's face on the coinage was a reminder of who was in charge. It also helped him legitimise his claim to Edward the Confessor, or at least continue to make the claim, and give his usurpation of the crown legitimacy.

Although more of a passive consequence of the Norman conquest, the ascension of William to the English throne saw a marked decline in slavery. The practice was largely gone from Normandy in 1066, with the last entry being given in the 1030s. Slaves from raids in England, Scotland and Ireland were captured and traded within the British Isles and 1066 was the first invasion that did not see the number of slaves in the country rise. While to our

Consolidating power

1028

William the Conqueror is born
William is born in Normandy. His early life is plagued by unsuccessful assassination attempts, which shape him into a hard figure.

1051

Promised the crown
Now Duke of Normandy, Duke William is promised the crown of England by Edward the Confessor who maybe makes the trip to Normandy to seal the deal.

6 January 1066

King Harold
As Edward the Confessor dies, the Anglo-Saxon Harold Godwinson takes the throne, although he is not without enemies, mainly William and Harald Hardrada.

September 1066

William crosses the Channel
Gathering men who would fight for land and wealth around him, William crosses the Channel along with thousands of men and horses.

October 1066

Battle of Hastings
William and the Normans win the day at Hastings after the death of Harold Godwinson. Eager to shore up his claim, William secures the south of England, including London.

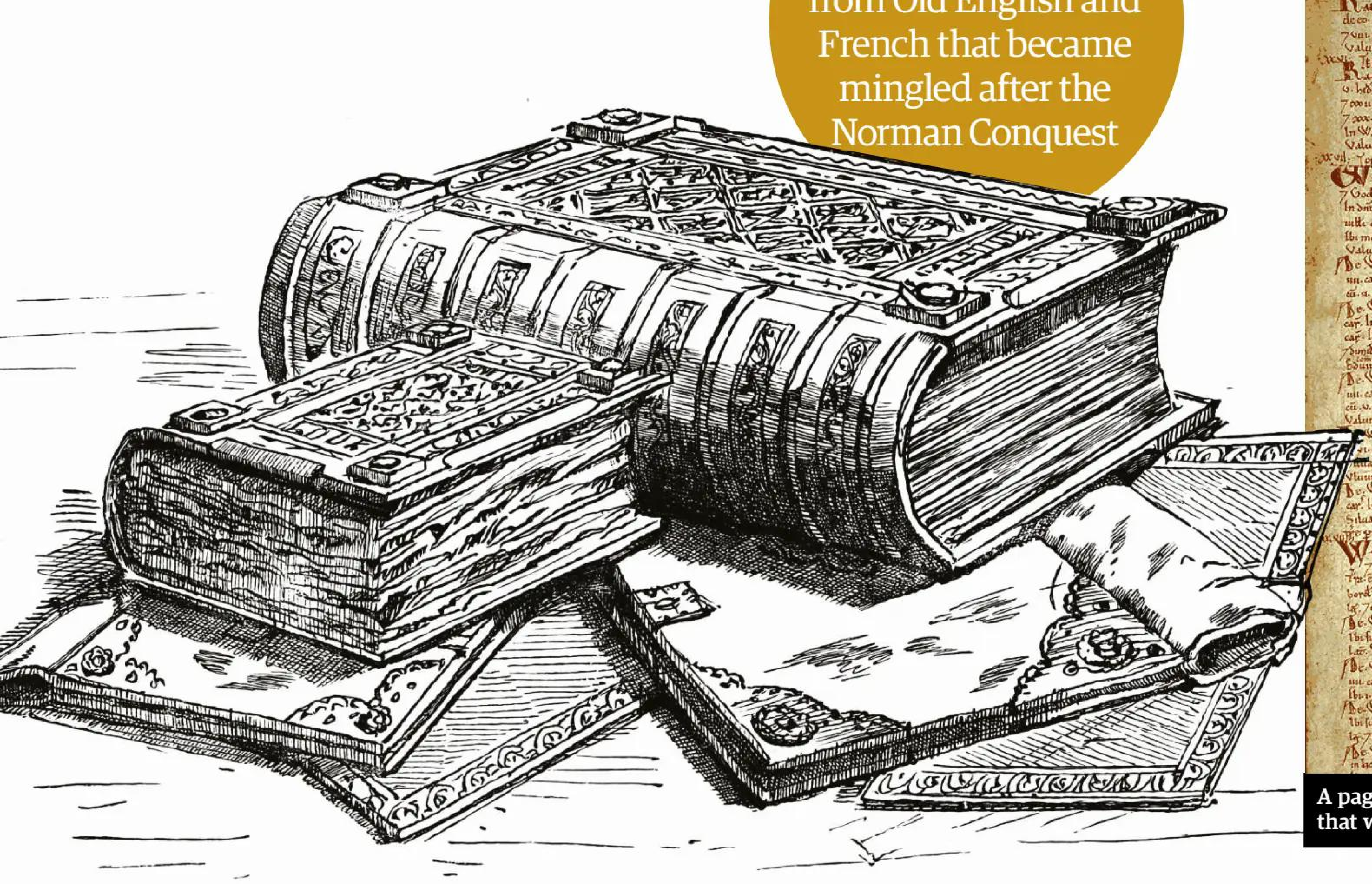
25 December 1066

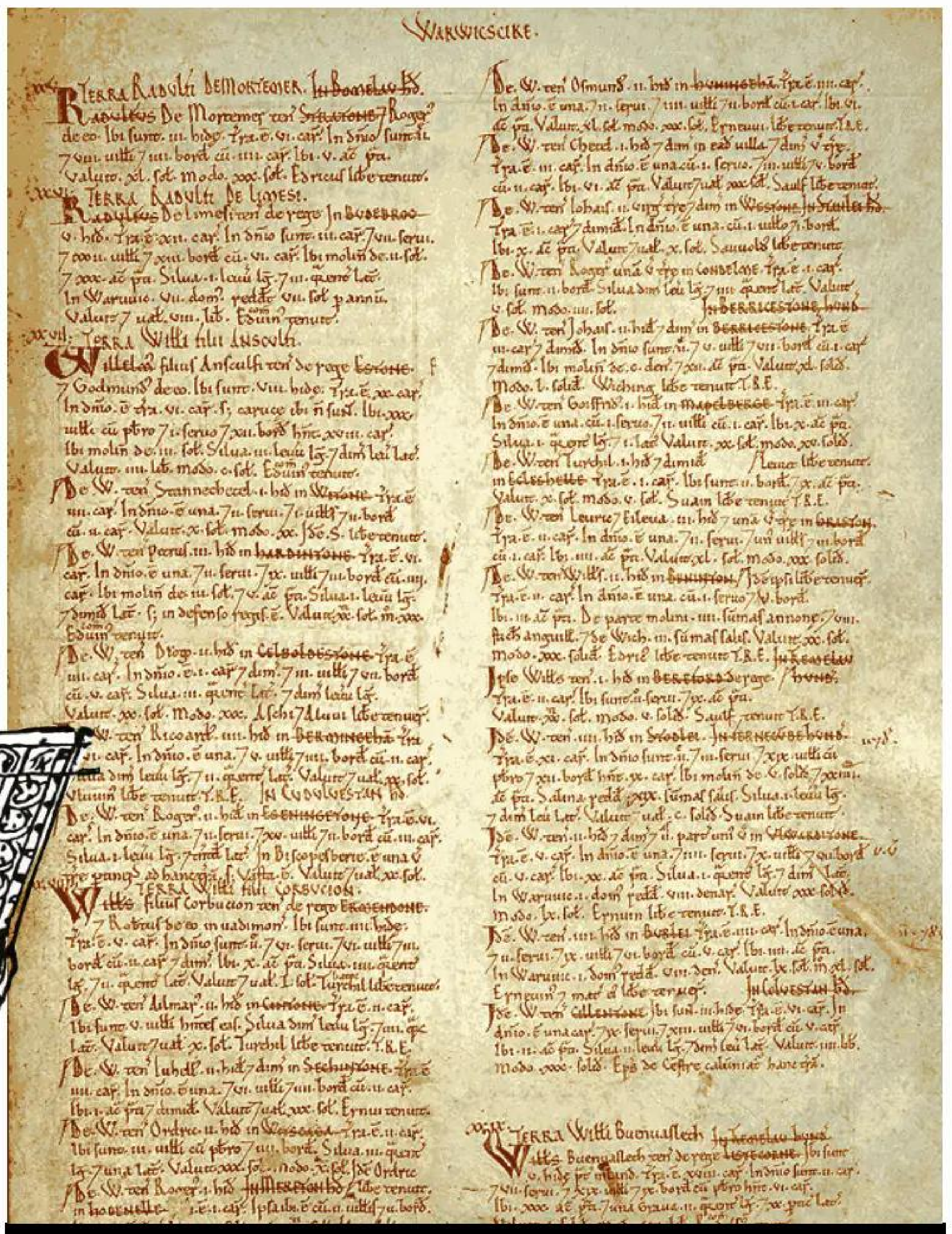
William takes the throne
William is crowned on Christmas Day in London. Due to a misunderstanding caused by the language barrier, William's men start several fires and a riot breaks out while the ceremony takes place.

1067

Invasion of Wales
Welsh raids prompts William to create new Earldoms to combat this threat. These men are given autonomy and slowly extend Norman control into the region.

Modern English still contains words from Old English and French that became mingled after the Norman Conquest





A page from the *Domesday Book*, the first survey of its kind that was commissioned by an English ruler

eyes this would seem like a positive step, William was reluctant to get rid of slavery, as he would stand to profit from the trade. It would continue, albeit in decline, until after the king's death when the Council of Westminster issued a decree that some interpret as banning the practice in 1102.

An important administrative contribution in William's reign was the commission of the *Domesday Book*. William and his advisors, members of the Witan, commissioned the work in 1085 and work on it is generally assumed to have stopped with the king's death in 1087. The contents of the book is the first serious attempt to catalogue the main taxable possessions in England. It was not a national survey, but a way for William to find out the wealth of the country. Armed with this knowledge, he could look for a way to exploit wealthy landowners. This view is supported by the fact that the writers of the book were only interested in the rents of properties and ignored things like livestock. The *Domesday Book* can be seen as an oppressive measure, as it was a way to control the population and gather more taxes.

As seen from his general actions and the fact he spent most of his time on the continent, England was of secondary concern for William. Here was a land with an effective administrative system that could fill the Conqueror's coffers. Instead of implementing a totally alien governmental system on the country, William just modified the existing structure. Unfortunately the Normans did not fully understand the Anglo-Saxon system that they would come to inherent. It was built to be administered from a central power base, something that the Normans did not understand. As a duchy, Normandy did not have a 'state' or centralised government. Each man would be driven by the desire for personal gain or glory, not loyalty to an ideal of a country. Faced with this new system, the Norman administrators tailored it.

One of the first changes were the government charters. From 1066-69 they were all written in old English, a language that William did not speak or read a word of. This was obviously a large concern for him so from 1069 onwards, all government documents started to be written in Latin.

The Conqueror and the pontiff

While Duke William was his own man who forged his own path, there was someone he sought a blessing from before beginning his invasion; Pope Alexander II. The head of the Catholic church, located in the Vatican, wielded great political power in western Christendom. Seen by Catholics as God's representative on Earth, his blessing for the invasion of England would lend William all the legitimacy he needed, regardless of offers that may have been made before.

Although Alexander's blessing is only recorded to have been given after the conquest succeeded, it is possible that he supplied William with a papal banner to use during his conquest, which suggests he acted with the full support of the pontiff.

The Duke also secured the endorsement of other European figures to lend political support for the invasion, namely the Holy Roman Emperor Henry V and Sweyn II of Denmark. Although these might sound impressive, the emperor was but a child and Sweyn was more likely to come down on the side of Harold Godwinson.

William's papal blessing also meant that the English church would fully support their new Norman overlords, meaning that Norman/Anglo-Saxon relations were better than expected. The English church could fully integrate with the new Norman government knowing that God's representative on Earth supported their actions.

1067

Leaving the country
William feels his new kingdom is secure enough to return to Normandy. He spends most of his rule on the continent fighting the various encroachments into his duchy.

1067 onwards

Rebellion rises
A string of uprisings threaten William's rule, like those led by Hereward the Wake and the northern counties. These uprisings are fuelled by local grievances.

1069-70

Harrying of the North
In an effort to cow the troublesome northern counties once and for all, William engages in campaigns of terror and slaughter – the Harrying of the North.

1070

Papal coronation
William is symbolically crowned in London by three papal legates. This can be seen as the papal 'seal of approval' that legitimises William's actions in the eyes of the church.

1085

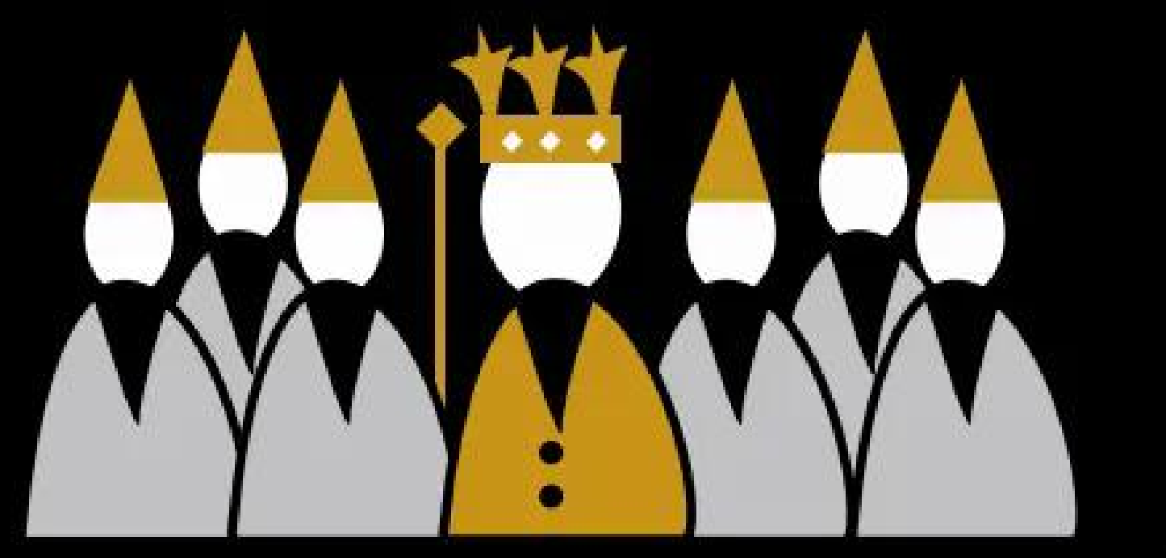
Domesday Book
In 1085, William commissions the writing of the *Domesday Book*, the first serious attempt to record the taxable holdings across England. It was also known as the book of judgement, which is where the odd name of *Domesday* came from. Work was stopped when the king died in 1087.

1087

William's death
William the Conqueror dies, and his realm is split between his two sons with Normandy being considered the better kingdom. They join to create what becomes the Angevin Empire.

Hero or Villain?

The native aristocracy



Unlike previous conquerors like Cnut, William did not initiate a wholesale slaughter of upper Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian society. Their lives were spared and the Norman and Anglo-Saxon cultures quickly started to mingle, with intermarrying becoming the norm, shortly after the invasion. This merging would become the basis for English medieval culture.

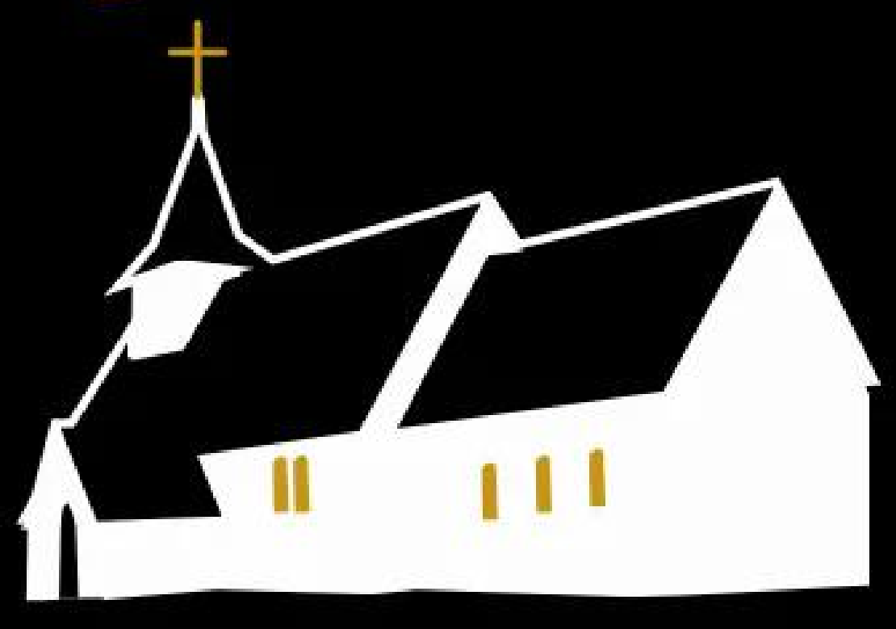
Although the Anglo-Saxon elite kept their lives, their wealth, power and land was stripped away from them by William. The men who had fought for the Normans at Hastings were given this confiscated wealth and the English were forced to become second-class citizens in their own country. Harsh laws, based on the Anglo-Saxon model, persecuted them even further and showed bias towards the Normans.

Slavery

While William did not ban slavery in England outright, it was a fading system in Normandy by the time of the invasion. The aftermath of 1066 was the first invasion and conquering of the British Isles that did not see a marked rise in slavery, and the practice had died out by the 12th century.

While individuals could enjoy life without the fear of being ripped away from their family, there was still a large divide between Anglo-Saxons and Normans in terms of civil liberties. Normans were the favoured citizens, and the kingdom's laws, built upon the old Anglo-Saxon system, were skewed in their favour. The old landed elite found their own laws being used against them.

The Anglo-Norman church



As was the normal scenario for medieval rulers, William was a devoutly religious man and made sure to secure the Pope's blessing of his invasion to ensure legitimacy in the eyes of the church. Carrying a papal banner into battle and having the backing of the Vatican, the general English church was successfully absorbed into the new kingdom.

In exactly the same way as what happened with the aristocracy, the upper ranks of the clergy were purged of anybody native and instead replaced with Normans or new Anglo-Saxons loyal to William. Clergymen also had different ideas about violence in these times, with men like Odo of Bayeux taking to the battlefield and fighting along with the Normans.

Foreign relations

William's relationship with Malcolm III of Scotland was generally thought to be a good one and peace between England and Scotland could only help bolster trade and protect northern England from raids. While there were periods of intermittent fighting between the two countries, William managed to secure an overall lasting piece with Scotland.

William applied military pressure to Malcolm to try and make him subservient to his rule, usually making Malcolm more inclined to support the Conqueror's enemies like the Danes and Edgar Ætheling, even going so far as to marry the latter's sister. These alliances almost inevitably led to conflict, which would result in the killing of William's subjects and destruction of land and property.

To further cement his claim, he kept and used Edward the Confessor's seal. This seemingly small act ensured that all government documents showed William, not Harold, to be Edward's successor, helping his claim seem legitimate and also eroding Harold's standing within the minds of his subjects, meaning public opinion would seem to favour William. Changing the charter language also had the effect of further blurring the lines between the Norman and Anglo-Saxon culture, intermingling the two.

> William founded Battle Abbey by the site of the Battle of Hastings as both a memorial for the dead and as a penance

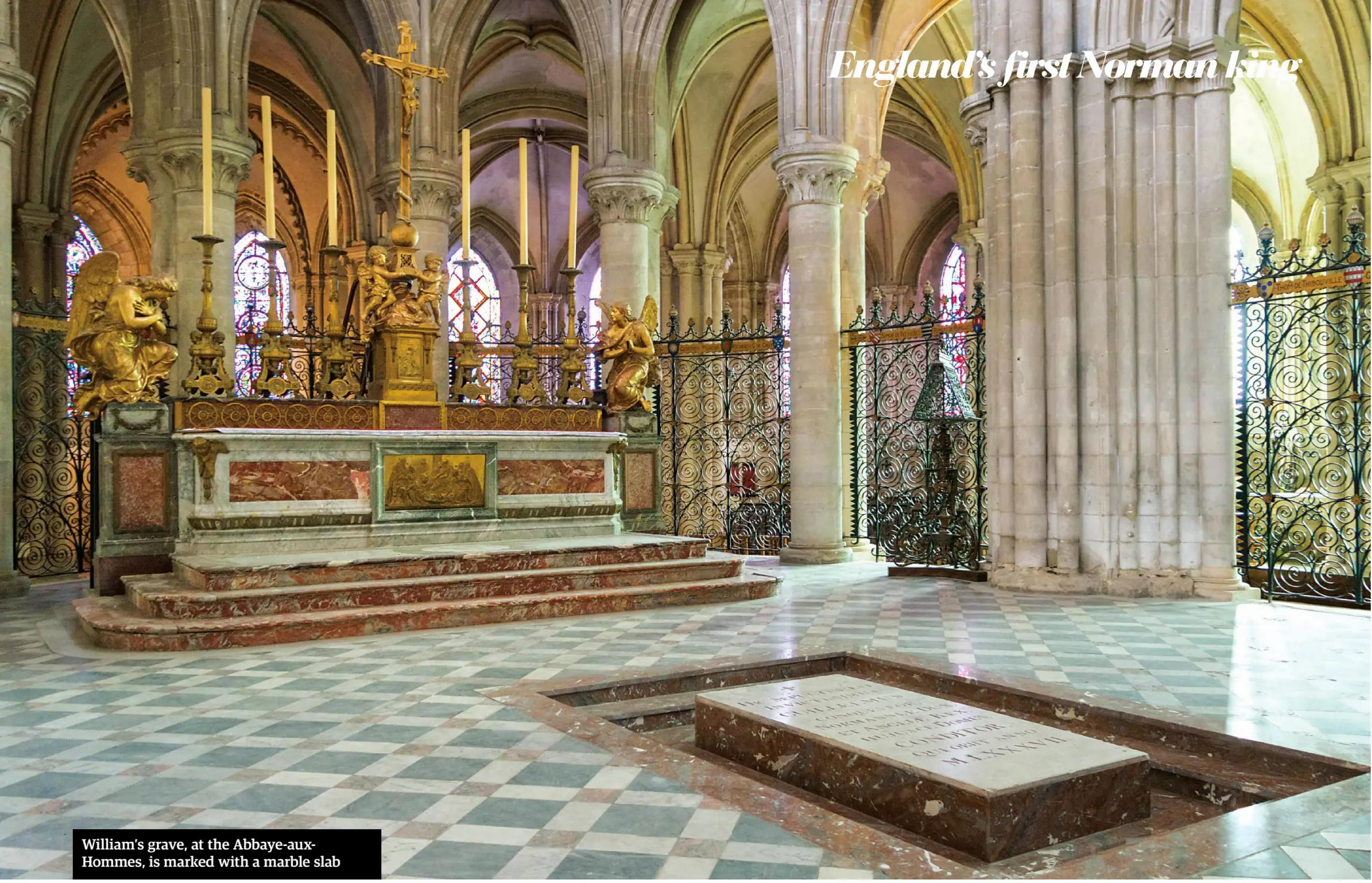
Changing land laws was also a method devised by William and his confidants to help secure his holdings as king. Land was taken away from individual possession and all held in kind by the throne. The Normans would then give out parcels of land to the upper-classes, usually men who had fought for William at Hastings, to hold in vassalage from the king. This ensured that the king held ultimate authority over his kingdom and secured the loyalty of many of his subjects with promises of wealth and power.

Another powerful law that showed the might of the king's power was the Forest Laws. This new system saw the king take control of a forest for hunting game, such as deer or boar. The local population were forbidden to use the forest in its entirety, a problem seeing as many used the forest as a source of sustenance. Even the local elite were not exempt from this oppressive law, showing the king held ultimate power and that no one could climb high enough to escape his grasp.

Social law was also modified under the Normans, mostly as a way to ensure Norman supremacy throughout the land. Like the Forest Law, these were largely oppressive and kept the local population under control. The Murder Fine was one such ethnic law that stated if a Norman is murdered and no perpetrator is found, the entire area would have to pay a fine until the culprit is found. This is an obvious incentive to rat out the culprit and would keep peasants from killing their lords as they could not shoulder the fines for very long. This is exactly what the Normans wanted; to keep local populations looking internally rather than looking outward, and risk the ordinary folk organising a countrywide resistance.

These administrative laws show just how marginalised the Anglo-Saxons had become. The word of an Englishman by itself would not hold much weight in the eyes of the law. During this time having an English name and not being able to speak French or Latin would have automatically put you several rungs down the social ladder. Usually an Anglo-Saxon accused of a crime would need ten English witnesses or one Norman vouching for him in order to have his defence carry any respect. If the man could not gather together this support, the ordeal of battle was also available. If a Norman and an Englishman were in a dispute over a crime, then innocence could be proven through trial by combat. This would take the form of a duel and the winner would be the man left standing. While most of the new laws were pro-Norman, there were smaller acts that would benefit most of the population and so help the country in general. The Norman administration increased power to the local sheriffs, so they would have more authority in local affairs without direct permission from the local lord. As long as you were a Norman or on good terms with one, you were in a better position than most of the population.

In the 11th century, England was not the only kingdom in the British Isles. To the north lay Scotland whose king, Malcolm III, was extremely



William's grave, at the Abbaye-aux-Hommes, is marked with a marble slab

competent and a man that William would lock horns with many times throughout his reign. Due to its border with northern England, Scotland received many refugees, both noble and otherwise, that were fleeing the turmoil caused by the Norman invasion. From the failed rebellions of 1067-68, the steady advance of the Norman military machine up the British Isles drove these dispossessed people over the northern borders. Linking up with the Anglo-Saxons still intent on making war, and sometimes with the Danes, Malcolm sought to defend York from William's aggression. In 1069 he attacked the city, and while the near-contemporary sources say he lost many men, he then destroyed, either by fire or flood, the crops and food surrounding the town. William was intent on starving out the rebellious factions in the north, making sure that even when his forces had left the region, they would not be able to field any opposition against him.

A coin from the reign of William. Having the king's likeness on the currency helped to remind people who was in charge

With Malcolm throwing his lot in with Edgar Ætheling, Scottish and English forces would clash several times in the late 1060s. Raids and counter raids were common, with southern Scotland, accessed via Cumbria, and the Northumbrian coast being on the receiving end of the violence. To further cement their alliance, Malcolm married Edgar's sister Margaret, who would go on to become Saint Margaret of Scotland and lend her name to places like Queensferry.

In 1072 William sailed north with a fleet, intending to bring Malcolm to heel. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* mentions that the two kings met at Abernethy and the king of Scotland paid homage to William, gave his son as a hostage and brokered a peace between William and Edgar. There would be relative peace between the two kingdoms until Scottish raids on Northumbria prompted the use of English military force again in 1080. This time Malcolm honoured the truce and a period of peace existed between the two kingdoms for the rest of William's reign.

The Scottish were not the only neighbours the Normans needed to deal with. To the west lay Wales, which had recently gone through massive upheaval caused by the Prince of Gwynedd, Gruffydd ap Llywelyn. Prior to 1066, the Welsh kingdoms had been united by Gruffydd. His victories over Mercia were short lived, however, as he was betrayed and killed by his own men three years before the Battle of Hastings. With Wales sliding back towards independently ruled kingdoms, it was in no shape to repel William and his Normans. Originally William was not overly concerned with Wales; after all, England was his birthright and he did not seem to have any solid plans to occupy the entire landmass. It was only after securing England that William turned his attention to Wales, his hand being forced by Welsh

Bones of the king

The death of William was a rather ignoble one for such an influential king. His body was left at Rouen, near the site of his death, as all those present had hurried away to secure their own positions, as a king's death is always a chaotic time. The priests at Rouen were left with William's body and, unsure of what to do, arranged to have it transported to Caen where it fell to a common knight to arrange the funeral services, all the royal court having left to tend to their own affairs. William was large both in character as well as physically, and his body had become so bloated by the time of his funeral that the stone sarcophagus would not close on the body. Attempts to force it down ended in disaster with a contemporary chronicler recording, "the swollen bowels burst, and an intolerable stench assailed the nostrils of the by-standers and the whole crowd".

What was left of his body was left until 1522 when his body was checked and re-interred. His remains were then destroyed by Calvinists 40 years later with only a single thigh bone remaining. This was preserved and reburied in 1642 with a new memorial erected in place, but this was destroyed in the French Revolution. Seeing as the king's remains were now long gone, a simple stone tablet marks his final resting place.

Building the White Tower

One of the first things William did when he secured the English crown was build castles throughout the country. As these structures were almost unknown in England before the conquest, they served as bastions that enabled the Normans to project total power. Perhaps the most famous of these constructions is the White Tower, better known as the Tower of London.

When it was first constructed it only consisted of the Keep. The rest of the structure would follow, with later monarchs adding more and more features. It would have been built from wood at first so it could be constructed quickly. The stone structure began in the 1070s and was wrapped up with William's death in 1087. William of Poitiers records the resistance the Normans encountered while building it; "certain fortifications were completed in the city against the restlessness of the huge and brutal populace. For he (William) realised that it was of the first importance to overawe the Londoners". Winning over the local population would ensure a stable capital, giving William a power base to push out from and secure the rest of the country. The White Tower was the first step in William's dominance over England and the British Isles.

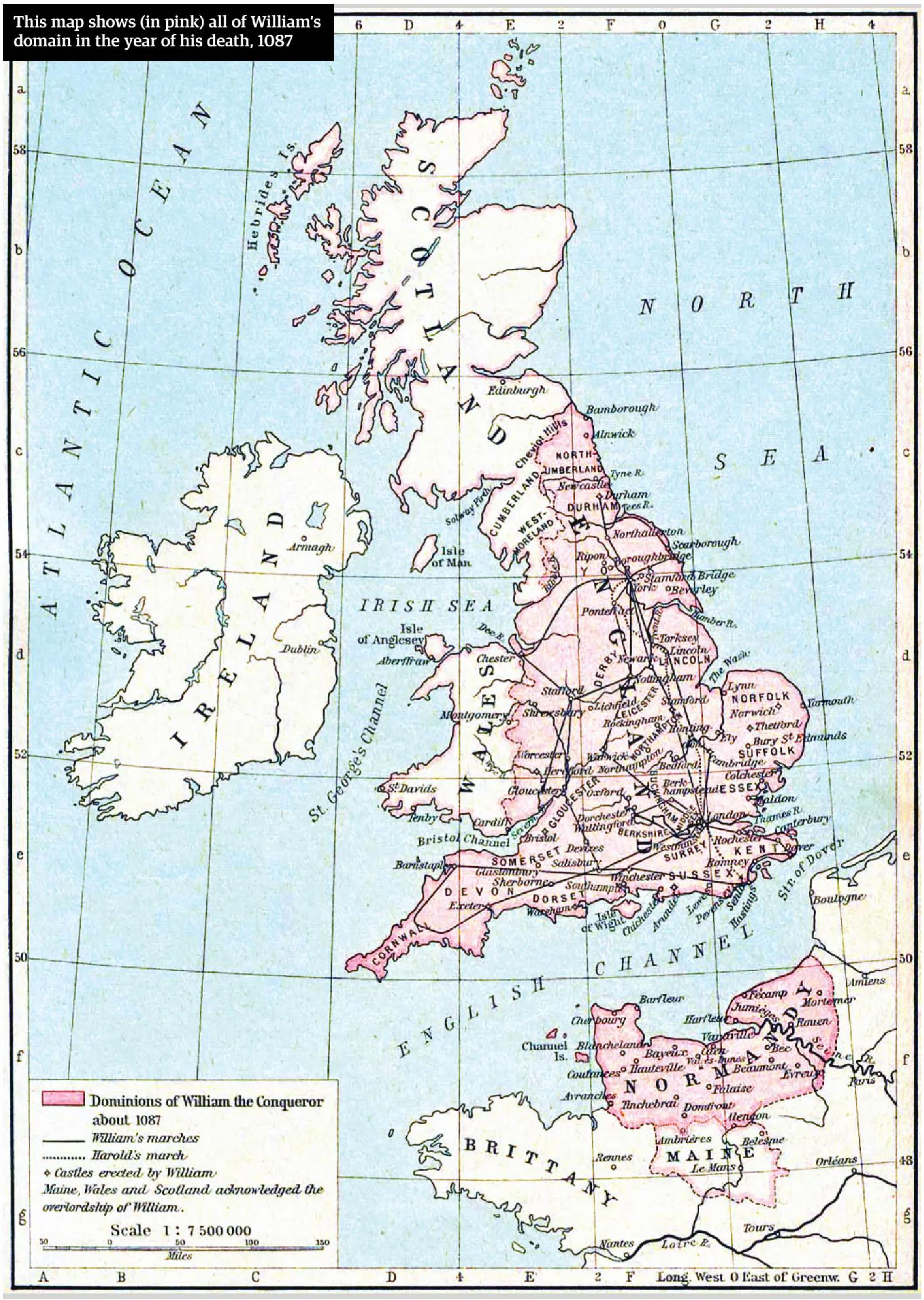
raids. To combat this he established the earldoms of Chester, Shrewsbury and Hereford, all given to men who had aggressive military tendencies. Interestingly enough, William gave these earldoms more autonomy than the rest of his kingdom, allowing the earls greater control over their surrounding lands and towns. This ensured that the aggressive Normans, not having to answer to the king for matters concerning their local land, would extend their territory into Wales, protecting the English border. This was an extremely effective policy as by 1086, the Earl of Hereford had snuffed out the kingdom of Gwent; the Earl of Shrewsbury secured Montgomery with a castle and had absorbed much of the borderland into his land; and the Earl of Chester had also struck deeply into Welsh territory. William would not live to see the end of the invasion, however, and after his death in 1087, his son William Rufus and subsequent kings would continue to push further into the country.

At the beginning of his rule, William and the Normans had to contend with a few years of sustained rebellion from the native Anglo-Saxons. After a sustained and brutal campaign followed by a period of systematic castle building, the local population were cowed; William had beaten the fight out of them. But when he had thought England secure, resistance was still simmering under the surface, but this time it would come from a different source. From 1072 onwards, William would spend the majority of his time on the continent, fending off invasion attempts from his neighbours. As much as 75 per cent of his time was devoted to this, showing that the administrative and governmental structures he had set up in England were functioning efficiently with the population content or afraid to rise up in arms again. The last major rebellion against William would come from within and was led by a man who had fought side-by-side with the Conqueror at Hastings; Ralph de Guader, Earl of East Anglia.

> William was happily married to a woman named Matilda, whose death in 1083 affected him greatly

Although he was born in England, his large Breton inheritance meant that he had sided with the Normans during the invasion and had fought to keep marauding Norsemen from wreaking havoc along the English coast in the years to follow.

His grievance against the crown was the refusal by William to allow him to marry the daughter of the powerful Earl of Hereford. The union of these two earldoms would have created a political powerhouse, not something the king wanted to deal with while he was defending his holdings in France. The marriage went ahead without William's blessing and the rebellion began in kind. Despite some support from the Earl of Northumbria, the rising ran into trouble almost as soon as it began. Northumbria would prove to be their undoing as having a change of heart, he alerted Archbishop Lanfranc to the rebel plans. The Norman warrior bishops would play a key role in the repression of this rebellion, with Odo and Geoffrey de Montbray leading the royal forces. These men were rightly feared and had been accused of committing atrocities during the early stages of the conquest. Bishop Geoffrey, who despised rebels, ordered that any captured rebel should have his right foot cut off as punishment. Even with 200 Danish ships


This map shows (in pink) all of William's domain in the year of his death, 1087

Dominions of William the Conqueror about 1087
William's marches
Harold's march
Castles erected by William
Maine, Wales and Scotland acknowledged the overlordship of William.
Scale 1 : 7 500 000
Miles
ATLANTIC OCEAN
NORTH SEA
IRISH SEA
ENGLISH CHANNEL
SCOTLAND
IRELAND
WALES
ENGLAND
NORMANDY
MAINE
BRITTANY
Hebrides Is.
Edinburgh
Bamborough
Alnwick
NORTHUMBERLAND
CUMBERLAND
WESTMORELAND
DURHAM
Durham
York
Stamford Bridge
Lincoln
LINCOLN
NORFOLK
SUFFOLK
ESSEX
London
KENT
SUSSEX
Hastings
Pevensey
Dover
Chester
Shrewsbury
Gloucester
Oxford
Cardiff
Bristol Channel
St. George's Channel
Dublin
Armagh
Isle of Man
Isle of Anglesey
SOMERSET
DEVON
DORSET
CORNWALL
Exeter
Salisbury
Winchester
Southampton
Isle of Wight
Channel Is.
Cherbourg
Bayeux
Caen
Rouen
Falaise
Le Mans
Rennes
Nantes
Tours
Orléans
Paris
Boulogne
Amiens
Long. West 0 East of Greenw.

lending their strength, the rebellion failed and its leaders were imprisoned until William's death in 1087. The harshest fate would fall on one of the more unlikely candidates, the Earl of Northumbria who had originally made the Normans aware of the rebellion. Said to have been a kind, charitable man, he was beheaded in 1076, the only English aristocrat to meet this fate during William's 21-year reign as king. With his death died all spirit for more English resistance.

As William was now king of England and Duke of Normandy, he exerted the right to rule over both kingdoms but did not make a conscious effort to join the two. After the king's death, his two sons were each given a separate piece; Normandy went to eldest son Robert while William Rufus was given England. Part of William's legacy was the creation of an aristocracy that spanned the Channel, holding lands in both England and on the continent. This was not done on purpose, instead it grew out of William's short-term military and political goals to secure his newly acquired crown. England and Normandy were officially joined when Robert sold his holdings to his brother William Rufus in order to fund his expedition to the Holy Land to fight in the First Crusade.

The treasures of the Normans

When people mention the Normans, the first image that springs to mind is usually castles. More than anything else William or any other Norman king achieved during their reigns, the castles have stood the test of time. Stone structures in this period would have been rare, and while many Norman castles were first constructed of wood, they were later converted to stone to enhance their defensive power. These structures were always carefully placed in strategic positions.

Pevensey Castle BUILT: 1066

An old Roman fortification, Pevensey was reoccupied by the Normans due to its strategic value. It was first used temporarily by the Normans just before the Battle of Hastings.

Old Sarum

BUILT: 1070

Old Sarum had also been a fortified location long before the Norman conquest. A wooden motte-and-bailey castle was constructed by the Normans in 1070 atop the Iron Age hillfort.

Chepstow Castle BUILT: 1067

Chepstow stands as a testament to the Norman's castle-building capability. While the site could have been the seat of an older fortification, Chepstow was built from the ground up.

Dover Castle BUILT: C.1066

The largest castle in England, Dover has been called the 'Key to England' due to its defensive significance. The exact year of construction is not known other than its closeness to the invasion.

© Alamy

Harrying of the North

In the winter of 1069 there came a rumble of rebellion from the north. William had no choice but to mount a campaign to quash the discontent

The Harrying of the North was a particularly brutal campaign of violence and destruction wrought by William the Conqueror in the winter of 1069-70. It was intended to subjugate those in northern England who were still proving troublesome and would not bend the knee to the Normans' rule.

Contemporary chronicles record the brutal savagery of the campaign and the amount of destruction and subsequent famine caused by the looting and burning of the countryside. But some doubt has been cast as to whether William could have assembled enough troops to inflict so much damage, and the records are believed to have been partly misinterpreted.

Our modern notion of the Normans as harsh and unforgiving rulers in no small part comes from this episode in British history. Being very much a martial people, their actions are often seen as brutal and heavy handed. Entire villages were put to the sword and swallowed by flame, with their populations, livestock and food stores destroyed in an orgy of violence that would have far-reaching effects on the region for many years to come.

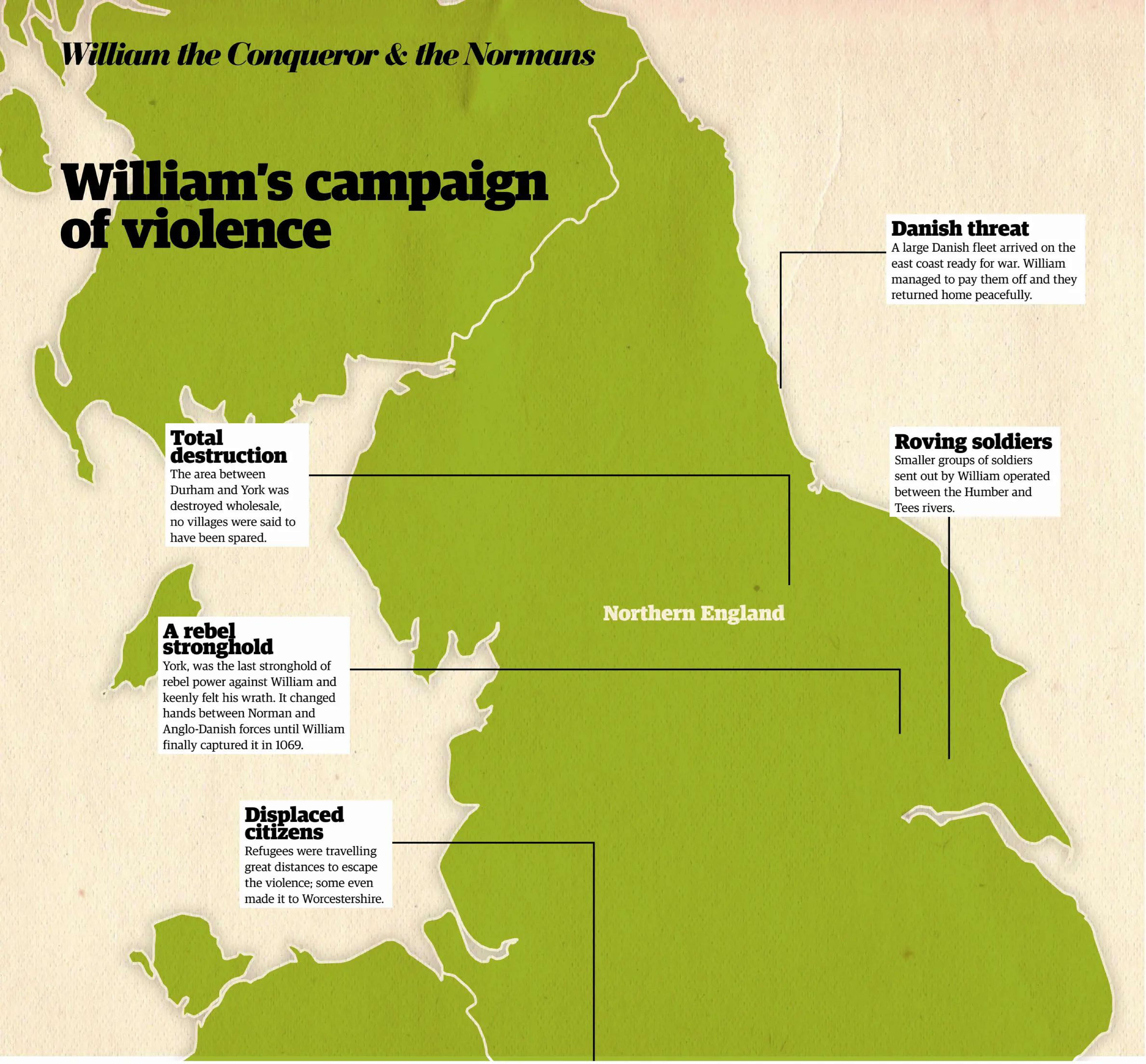
But why was the north in particular targeted, especially as rebellions had occurred all across the country? The inevitable rumble of the Norman war machine was bound to come to the north eventually. For three years the army had been in the field, crushing uprisings underfoot and embarking on a system of castle building that was designed to make sure that England's whole population was held under William's sway. The newly crowned king had made several non-military attempts to impose his will on northern England; perhaps a move calculated to appease the local population was having an Englishman in charge. This theory backfired, however, as when a native lord named Copsig was given the north to govern, a rival assassinated him in 1067. After him came another Saxon man named Gospatric, but he too failed to bring about Norman supremacy as he defected in 1068 to join rebels gathering in the Midlands. This gathering was lead by Edgar Ætheling, the last claimant of the house of Wessex and a thorn in William's side.

Enraged by these failures William sent a Norman, Robert Cumin, north in January 1069. Cumin was not alone and rode at the head of a force of experienced and heavily armed men. Even this show of strength turned out to be a paper tiger as they were ambushed and massacred at Durham.

Emboldened by their defeat of Robert Cumin and his men, the English rebels continued on to York where they killed the Norman retainer of the castle and a great number of his men. It had now become clear to William that the north was a serious problem, and in his retaliation he saw off the besiegers.

Victory seemed a long way off, however, as to compound William's problems, a large Danish fleet, as many as 300 ships, sailed to England intent on plunder. Using a system that had served some previous Anglo-Saxon rulers well, he

William's campaign of violence



Danish threat
A large Danish fleet arrived on the east coast ready for war. William managed to pay them off and they returned home peacefully.

Total destruction
The area between Durham and York was destroyed wholesale, no villages were said to have been spared.

Roving soldiers
Smaller groups of soldiers sent out by William operated between the Humber and Tees rivers.

A rebel stronghold
York, was the last stronghold of rebel power against William and keenly felt his wrath. It changed hands between Norman and Anglo-Danish forces until William finally captured it in 1069.

Displaced citizens
Refugees were travelling great distances to escape the violence; some even made it to Worcestershire.

promised them vast amounts of treasure, known as Danegeld, to have them leave the British Isles peacefully. Unfortunately for the northern English, the Danes had been a strong ally with whom they had attacked and retaken strategically important towns like York, one of the greatest ports of eastern England.

Now rid of the Danish threat, William decided that he would destroy the rebel's means to fight by cutting off their food supplies.

Orderic Vitalis, a monk who wrote extensively on this period, described William's action: "The King stopped at nothing to hunt his enemies. He cut down many people and destroyed homes and land. Nowhere else had he shown such cruelty… To his shame, William made no effort to control his fury, punishing the innocent with the guilty. He ordered that crops and herds, tools and food be burned to ashes. More than 100,000 people perished of hunger. I have often praised William in this book, but I can say nothing good about this brutal slaughter. God will punish him."

As a consequence of the Norman invasion, England lost its prosperous links with Norway and Denmark

These attacks took place in northern Yorkshire, and worse was yet to come as William then sent smaller raiding parties north to continue in this orgy of destruction. As well as burning towns and crops, William was also searching high and low or any other signs of rebels. Forests and mountain regions were swept to ensure that no stone was left unturned in the search. In short, William was tired of these constant rebellions and raids; the harrying was meant to stamp them out once and for all.

These men operated from the River Humber to the River Tees, and such was the displacement felt by the population that some refugees had travelled as far as Worcestershire to escape the violence.

A few different contemporary chroniclers, none of whom have encouraging things to say, record the aftermath of the harrying. John of Worcester wrote that food was so scarce that what was left of the population were reduced to eating horses, dogs and cats. He also lists human flesh as something people were forced to eat, but this might have been an apocryphal tale intended to shock readers. These gruesome stories were born out of the harsh winter of 1070, and lack of food may have driven some people to commit the ultimate taboo. Whatever the truth, it is generally assumed that about 10,000 died of starvation in the immediate aftermath, the famine being caused by the wholesale destruction of crops and food stores.

William of Malsbury laments the destruction of York, claiming that 30 miles around the town no crops had escaped destruction. Either fire-ravaged or water-logged fields greeted any visitor to the now dishevelled city, something that would not change for many years after.

The fatality figure of 100,000 that Orderic Vitalis gives us is a gross exaggeration, a trend not uncommon among medieval chronicles. With the entire population of England at the time in the region of 2 million, 100,000 deaths would have seen five per cent of England snuffed out. A death toll in the thousands, possibly even tens of thousands, is possible, however, and a loss of life on this scale would still have devastated the region.

Years later, as he lay dying, William is recorded to have tried to atone for the brutal slaughter that was wrought in his name. Orderic Vitalis records it as: "I treated the native inhabitants of the kingdom with unreasonable severity, cruelly oppressed high and low, unjustly disinherited many, and caused the death of thousands by starvation and war, especially in Yorkshire… In mad fury I descended on the English of the north like a raging lion, and ordered that their homes and crops with all their equipment and furnishings should be burnt at once and their great flocks and herds of sheep and cattle slaughtered everywhere. So I chastised a great multitude of men and women with the lash of starvation and, alas! was the cruel murderer of many thousands, both young and old, of this fair people."

Although this apology may have been an invention by Orderic, writing how he thought a king should act, some have begun to question whether or not the Normans would have had enough men in the region to actually cause this much destruction. Theories abound that Scottish or Danish troops may have contributed to the devastation, only to have all the blame placed on the Normans.

While historians argue over the material damage done, none can deny the psychological blow dealt to the Anglo-Saxon psyche by William's actions. The act has left an indelible mark on our perception of the Normans. They were a hard, martial people who would go to great lengths to secure their rule over a problematic population. While their actions are abhorrent by today's standards, they spoke a loud and clear message to the Anglo-Saxons: the Normans are here to stay, and to resist is futile.

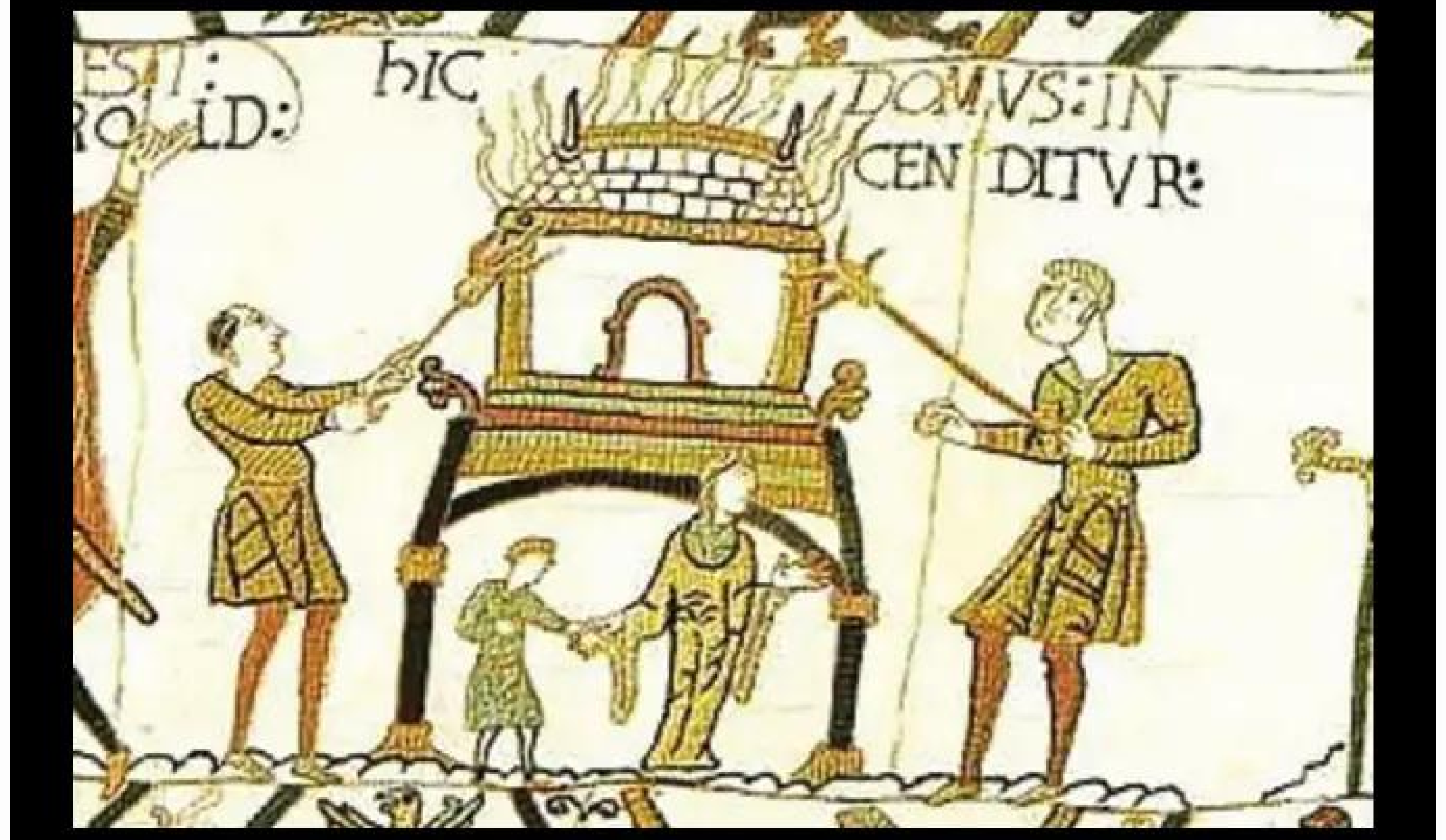
> Near the end of his life, William the Conqueror was recorded as showing regret at the brutal action he took

Genocide of the North

Being such a controversial act in English history, the Harrying of the North has sometimes been described as a genocide of the population of northern England by their Norman overlords. This is a tricky term to apply to the event as it usually means imposing our modern views of morality on what is in essence a standard military tactic of the time.

Armies had been used in raids such as this to deny supplies and defeat enemies without ever fighting them on the battlefield. A Roman author stated, "The main and principal point in war is to secure plenty of provisions for oneself, and to destroy the enemy by famine." In this context, the actions are defendable from a military point of view, if still horrific in their execution. The other side of the argument is that William was intent on depopulating the north so much that it would never again have the capacity to rise in rebellion after he had left the region.

As experts are no closer to agreeing on any one definition of the event, this will remain a contentious subject due to the sheer scale and calculation that went in to the operation.



The Anglo-Saxon population bore the brunt of the Harrying, prompting some to label it a genocide

The cost of the campaign

20 YEARS The length of time most of the land damaged remained uninhabitable

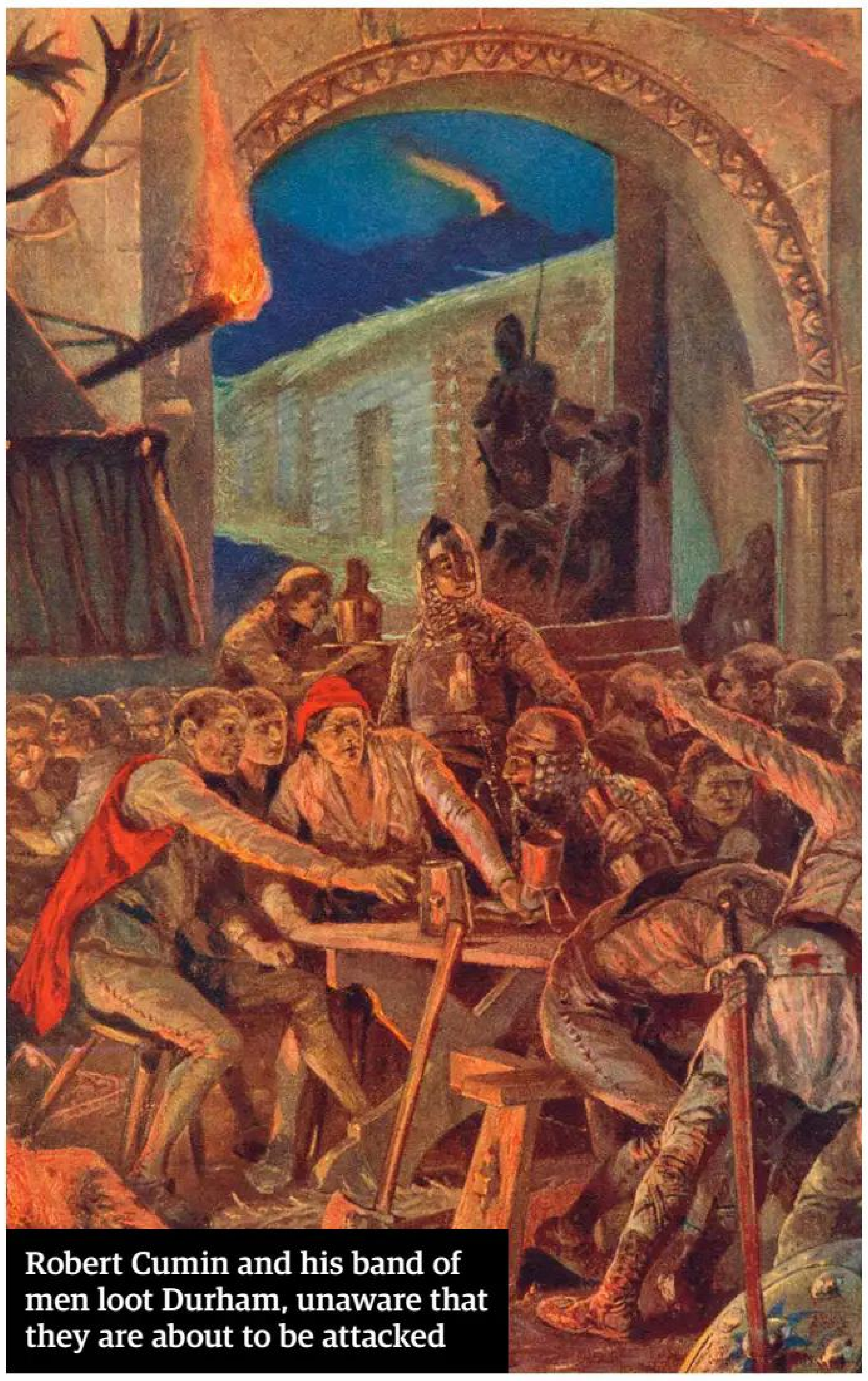
97KM the distance between York and Durham that was filled with uninhabited villages

100,000 The maximum number of people who lost their lives

25% The total percentage of the remaining population after the Harrying

66% The percentage of estates still lying abandoned in 1086

HUMAN FLESH The survivors of the raids were supposedly forced to eat



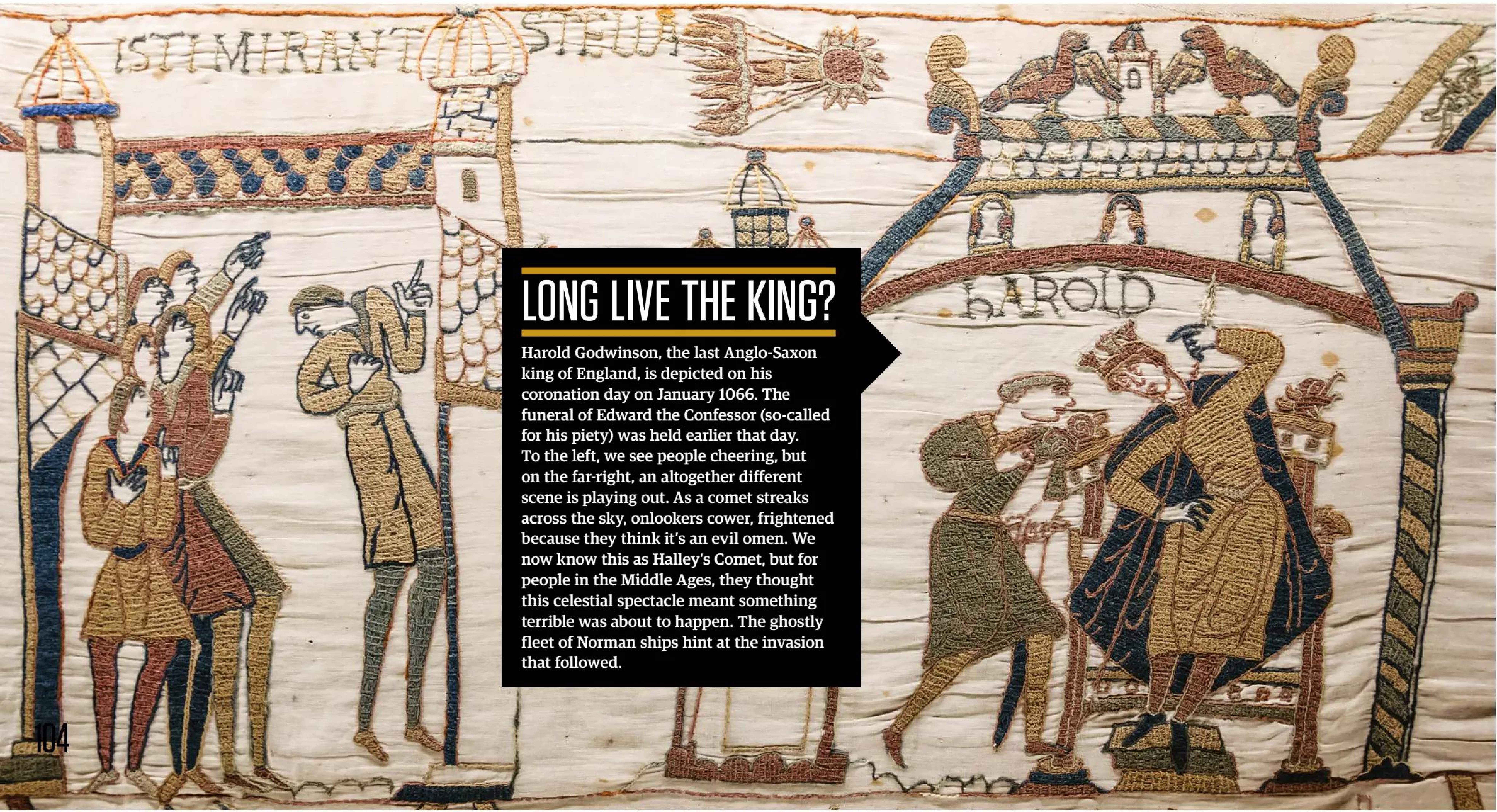
Robert Cumin and his band of men loot Durham, unaware that they are about to be attacked

Unpick the story of the Bayeux Tapestry

Discover the origins, myths and the events of 1066, as told by this amazing piece of history

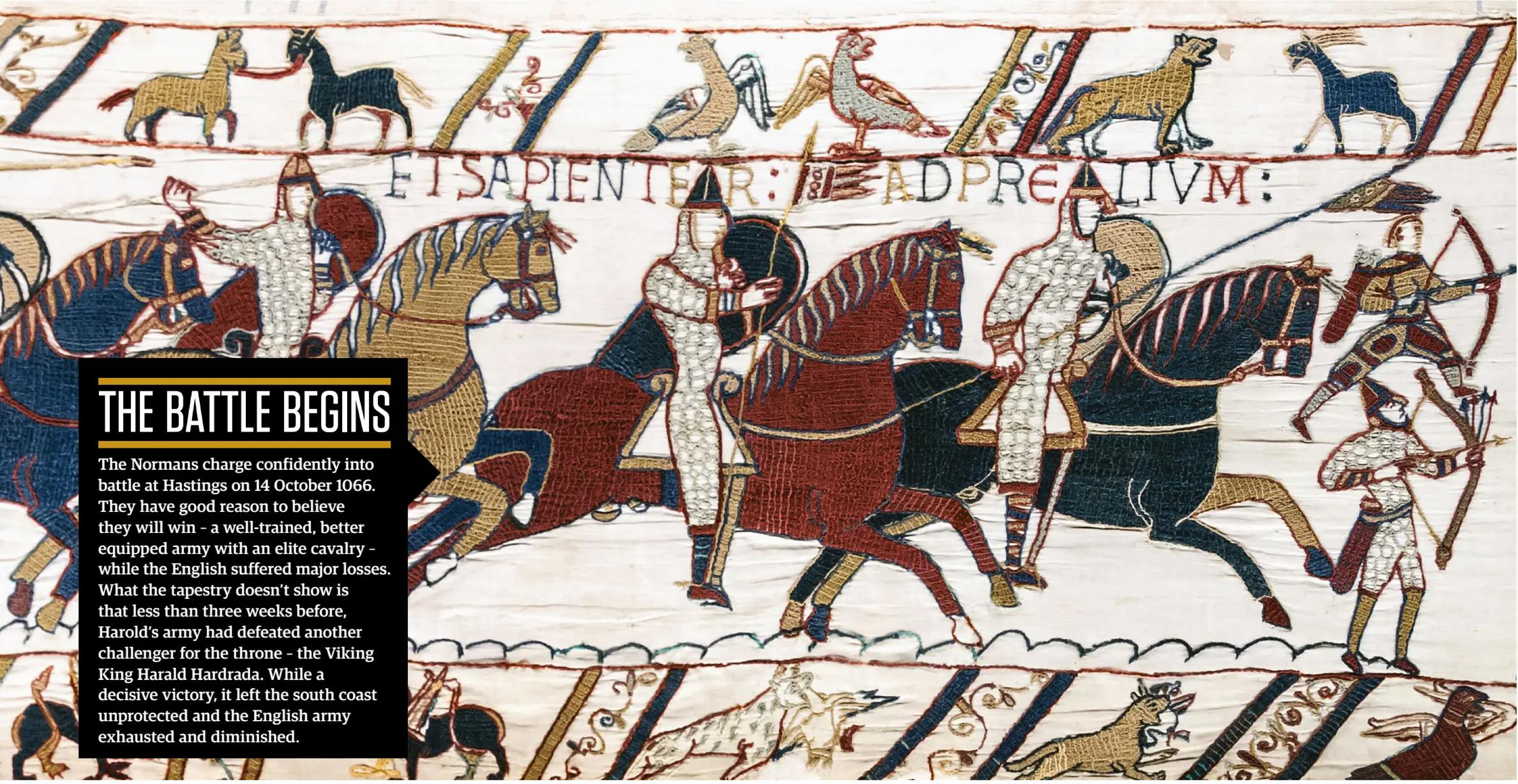
The Bayeux Tapestry tells the story of the Norman Conquest of England in 1066. It was likely commissioned in the 1070s by William the Conqueror's half-brother, Bishop Odo of Bayeux, and so the embroidered events are told from the Norman point of view, casting some doubt over its historical accuracy. Incidentally, the fact that the linen cloth was embroidered rather than woven means that it's not even a tapestry at all. What's more, it's thought to have been made in England, but it was re-discovered in Bayeux Cathedral in the 18th century and the name stuck.

At 50 centimetres tall and 70 metres long, the Bayeux Tapestry is about the length of three swimming pools. It contains over 50 scenes that take us from the events leading up to the battle, from the oath that Harold allegedly made to William, promising to support his claim to England's throne, to the moment Harold broke that oath and seized the throne, through to the Battle of Hastings, when England was changed forever. Latin – the predominant written language in the Middle Ages – is embroidered through the tapestry, aiding historians in their quest to uncover its secrets.



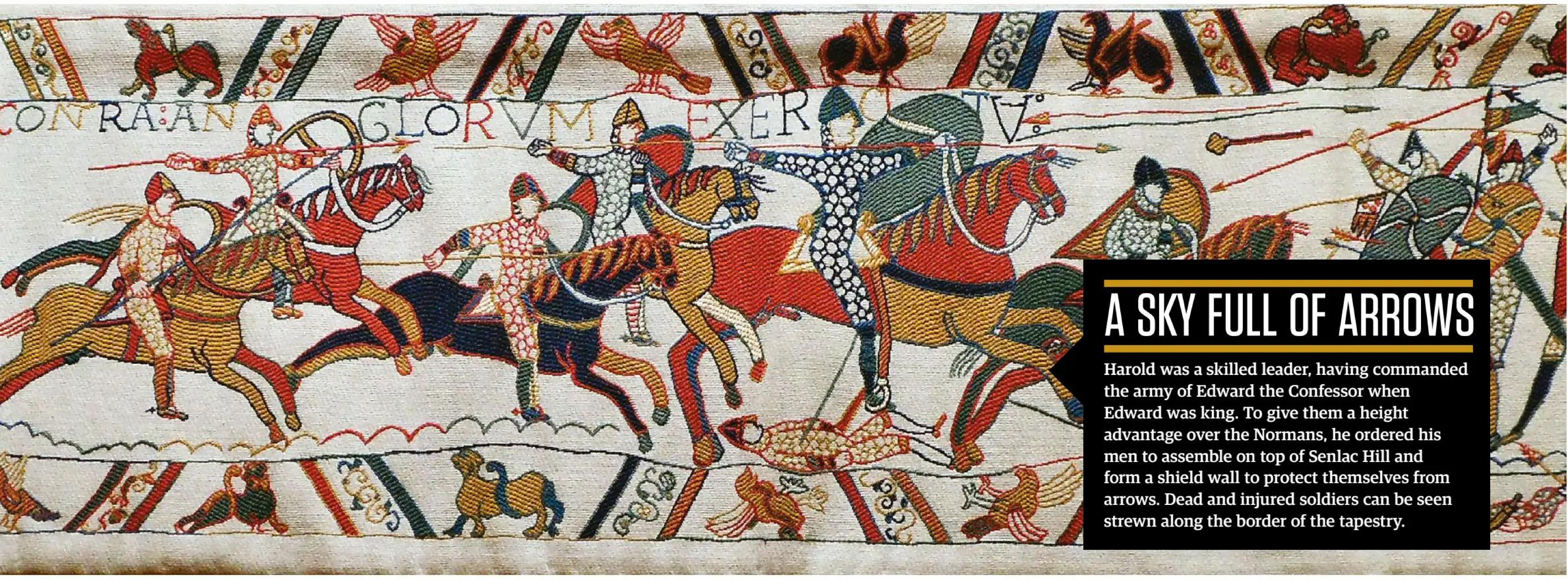
LONG LIVE THE KING?

Harold Godwinson, the last Anglo-Saxon king of England, is depicted on his coronation day on January 1066. The funeral of Edward the Confessor (so-called for his piety) was held earlier that day. To the left, we see people cheering, but on the far-right, an altogether different scene is playing out. As a comet streaks across the sky, onlookers cower, frightened because they think it's an evil omen. We now know this as Halley's Comet, but for people in the Middle Ages, they thought this celestial spectacle meant something terrible was about to happen. The ghostly fleet of Norman ships hint at the invasion that followed.



THE BATTLE BEGINS

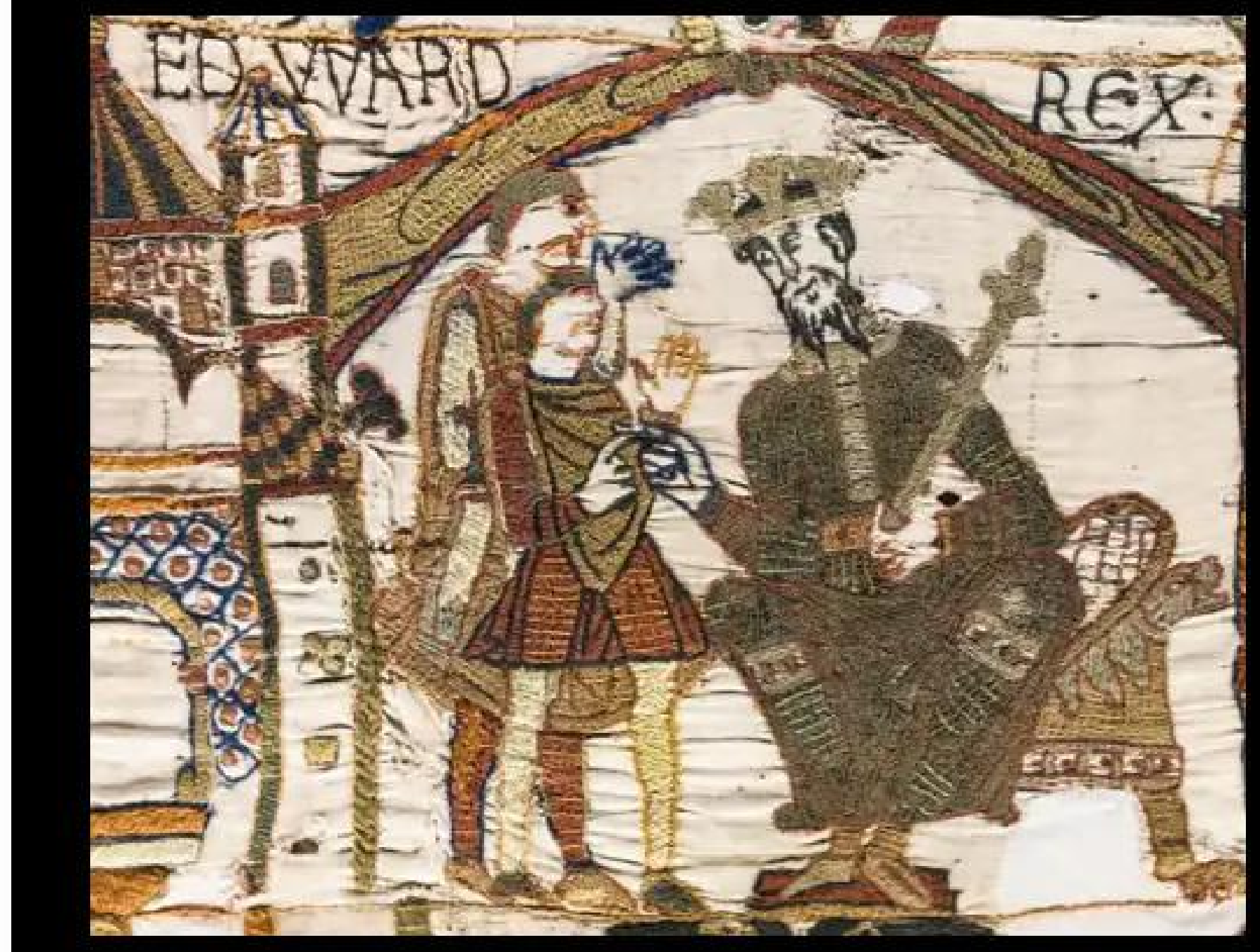
The Normans charge confidently into battle at Hastings on 14 October 1066. They have good reason to believe they will win - a well-trained, better equipped army with an elite cavalry - while the English suffered major losses. What the tapestry doesn't show is that less than three weeks before, Harold's army had defeated another challenger for the throne - the Viking King Harald Hardrada. While a decisive victory, it left the south coast unprotected and the English army exhausted and diminished.



A SKY FULL OF ARROWS

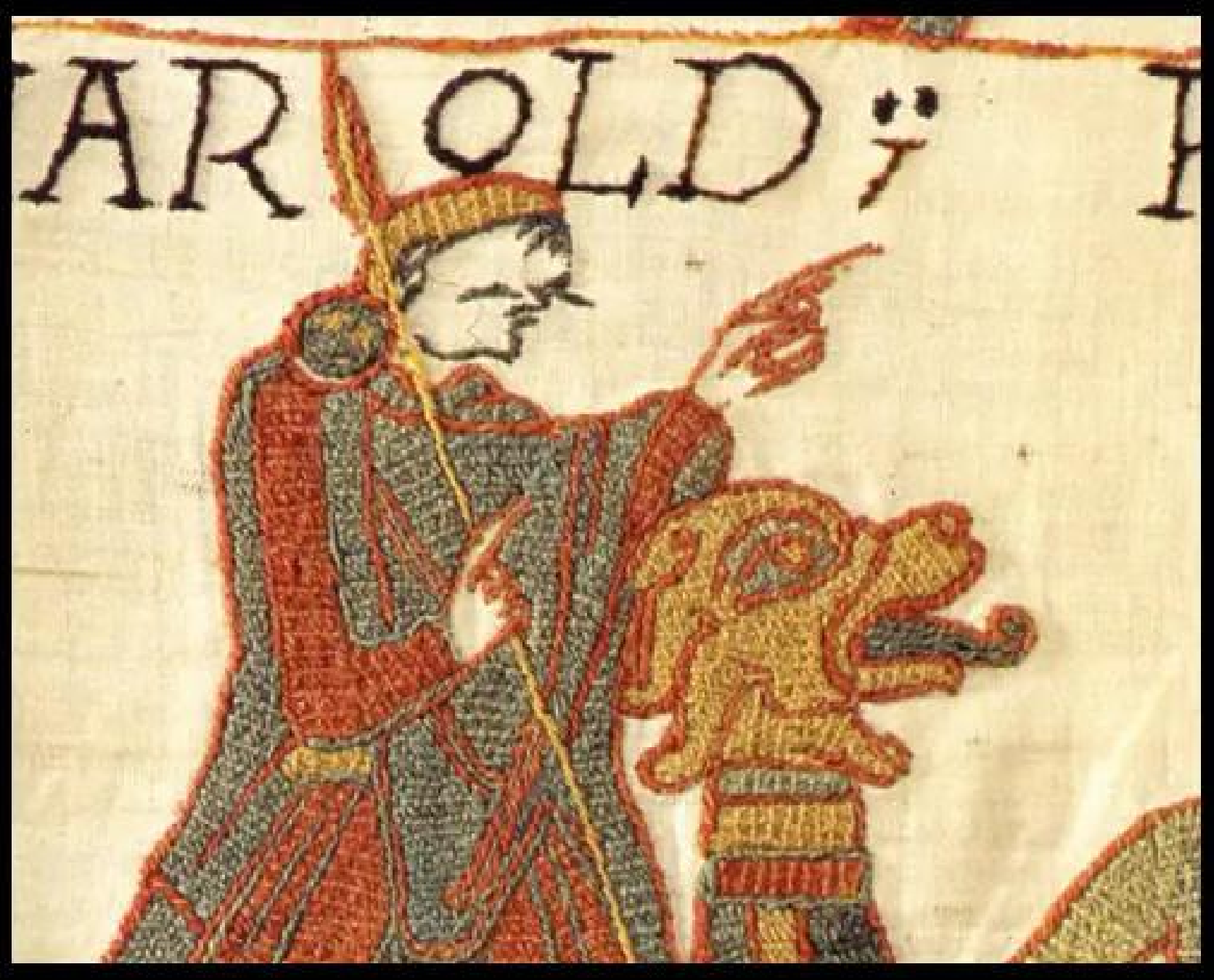
Harold was a skilled leader, having commanded the army of Edward the Confessor when Edward was king. To give them a height advantage over the Normans, he ordered his men to assemble on top of Senlac Hill and form a shield wall to protect themselves from arrows. Dead and injured soldiers can be seen strewn along the border of the tapestry.

The key players of the tapestry



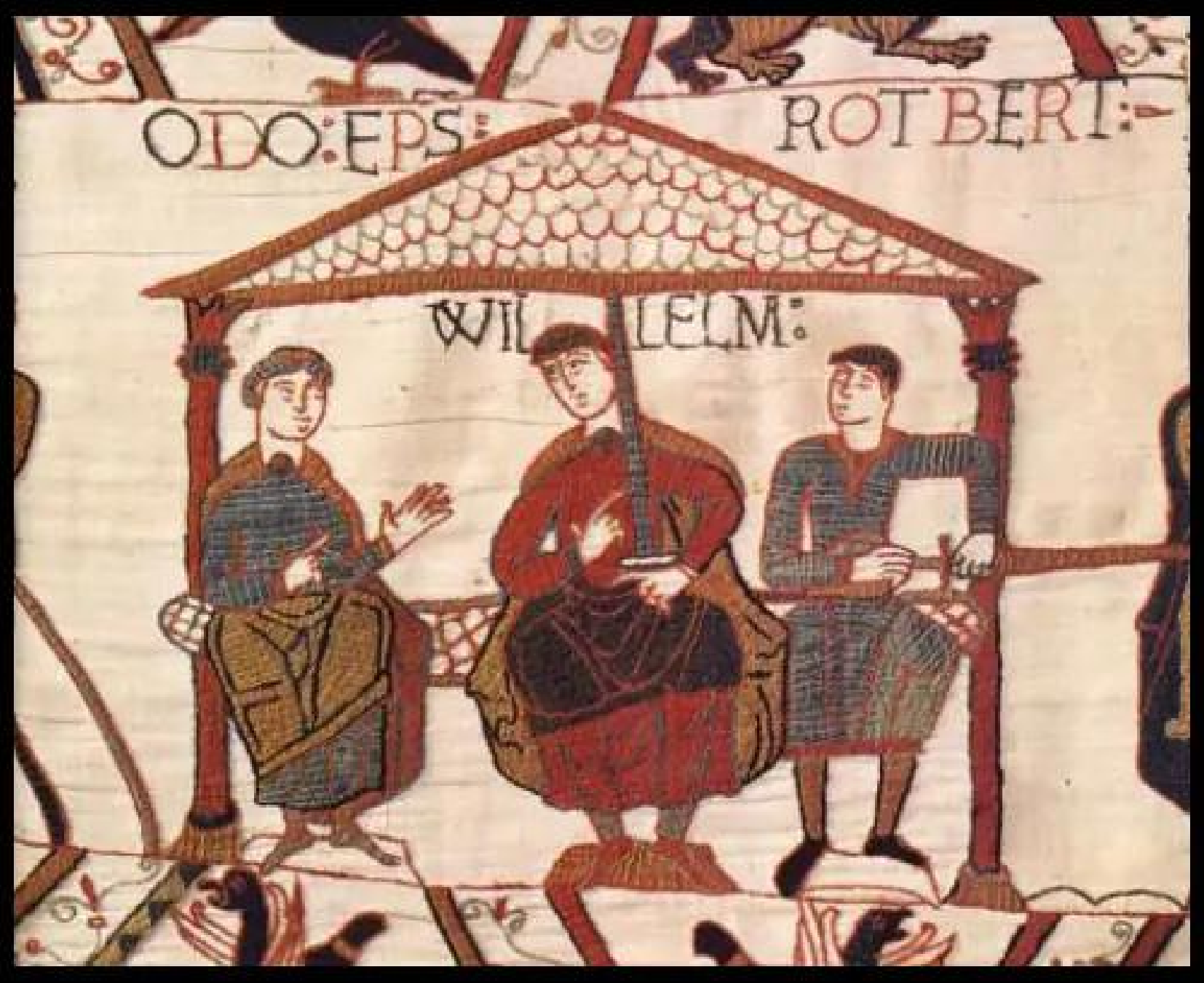
Edward the Confessor

The king of England from 1042-1066 enjoyed a peaceful, prosperous reign, but he died with no heirs.



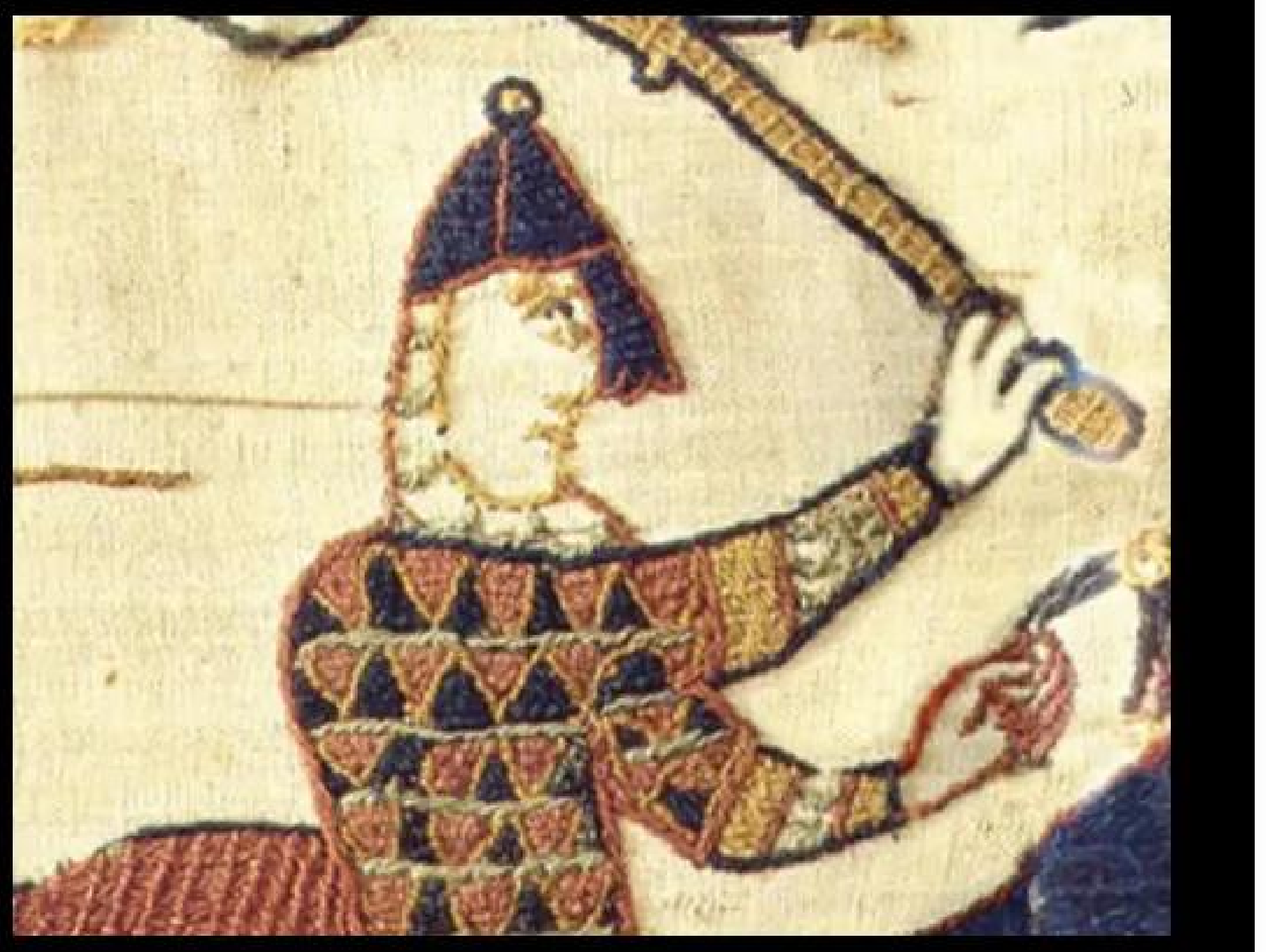
Harold Godwinson

Harold Godwinson wasn't royal, but his sister was married to Edward and he was the son of a wealthy Saxon earl.



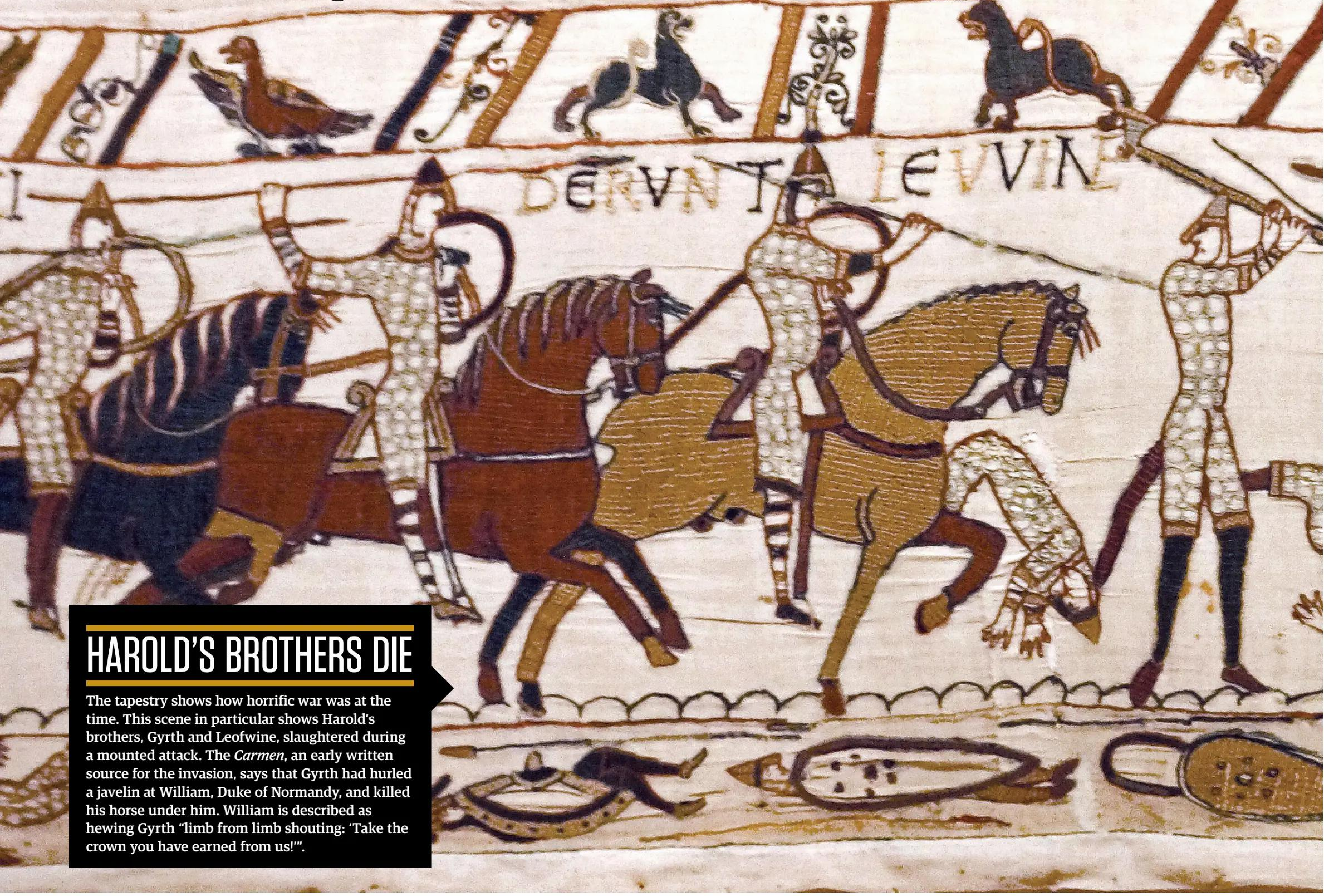
William of Normandy

From a bastard son to the conqueror of England, William argued that Edward had promised the throne to him.



Bishop Odo

William's half-brother was invited to invade England, and is said to have contributed 100 ships.


DERVNT
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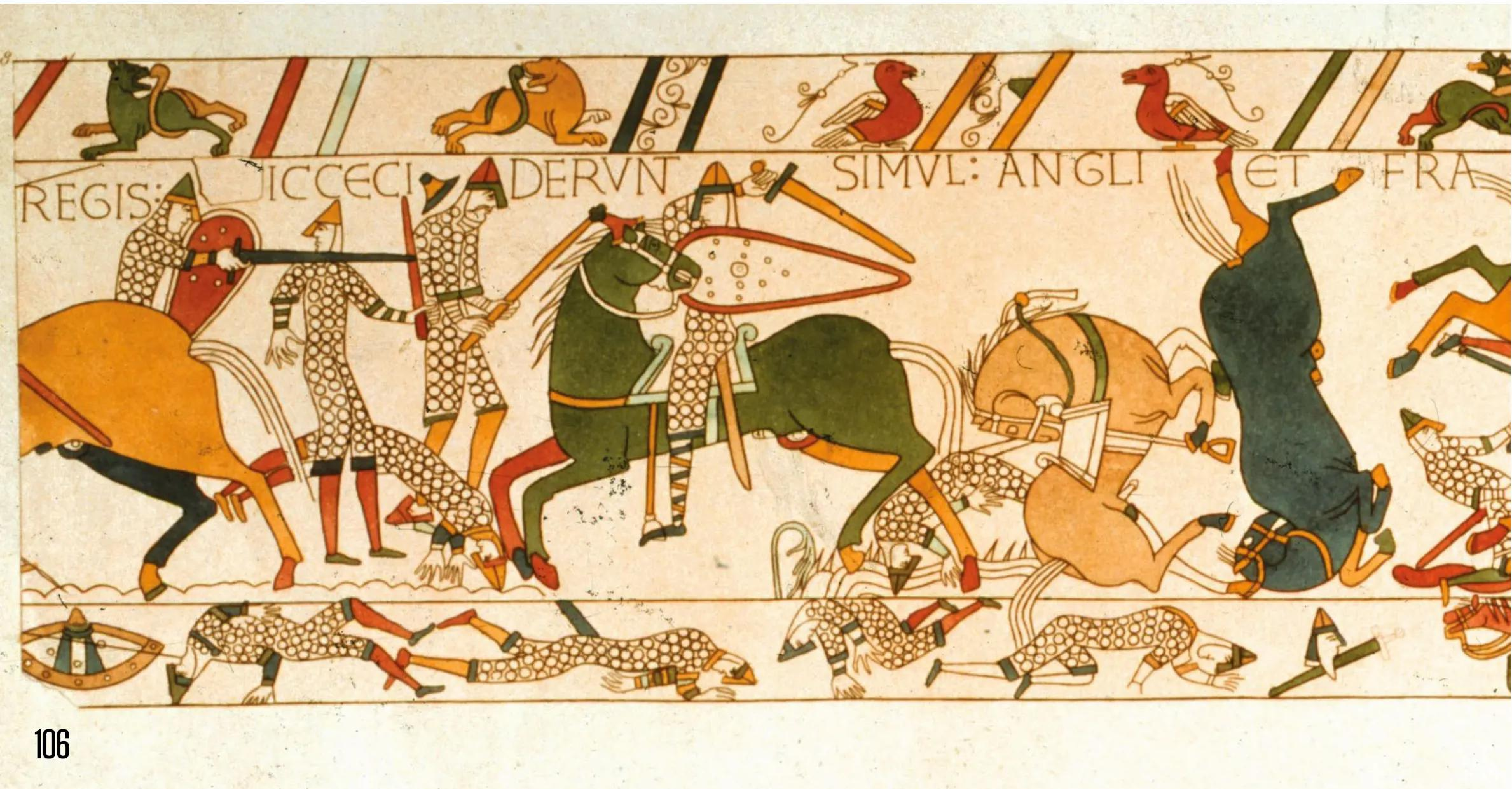
HAROLD'S BROTHERS DIE

The tapestry shows how horrific war was at the time. This scene in particular shows Harold's brothers, Gyrth and Leofwine, slaughtered during a mounted attack. The *Carmen*, an early written source for the invasion, says that Gyrth had hurled a javelin at William, Duke of Normandy, and killed his horse under him. William is described as hewing Gyrth "limb from limb shouting: 'Take the crown you have earned from us!'".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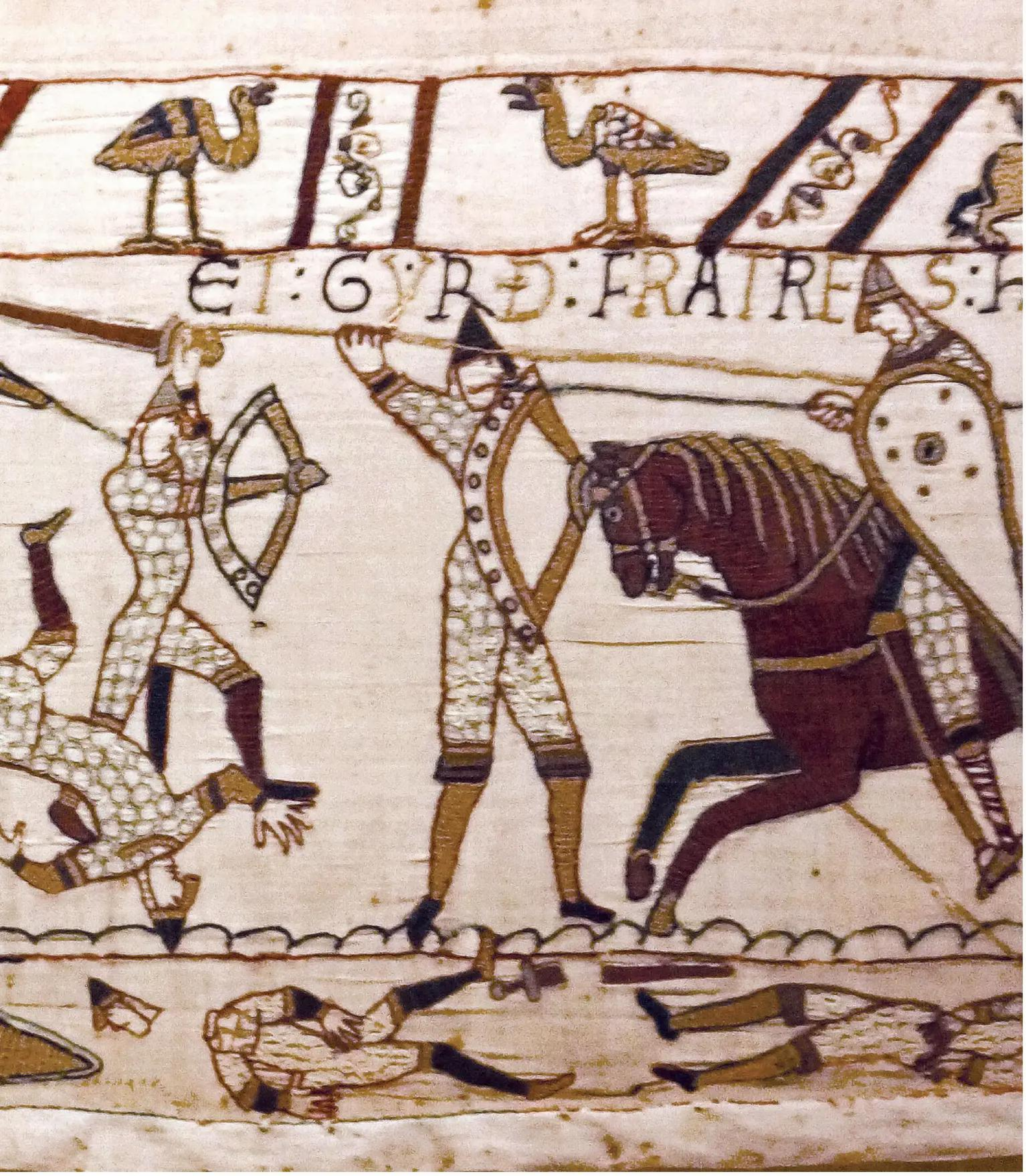
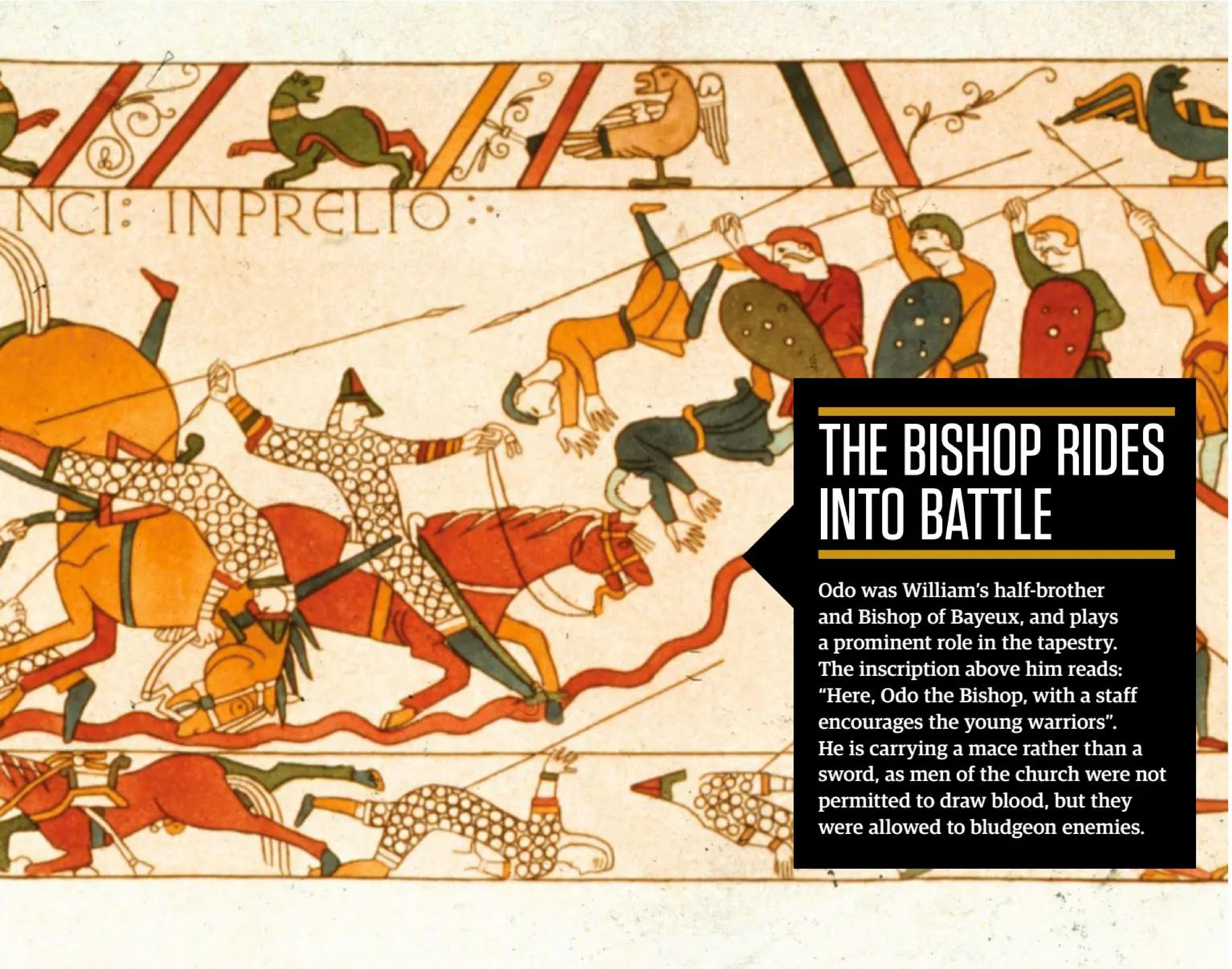
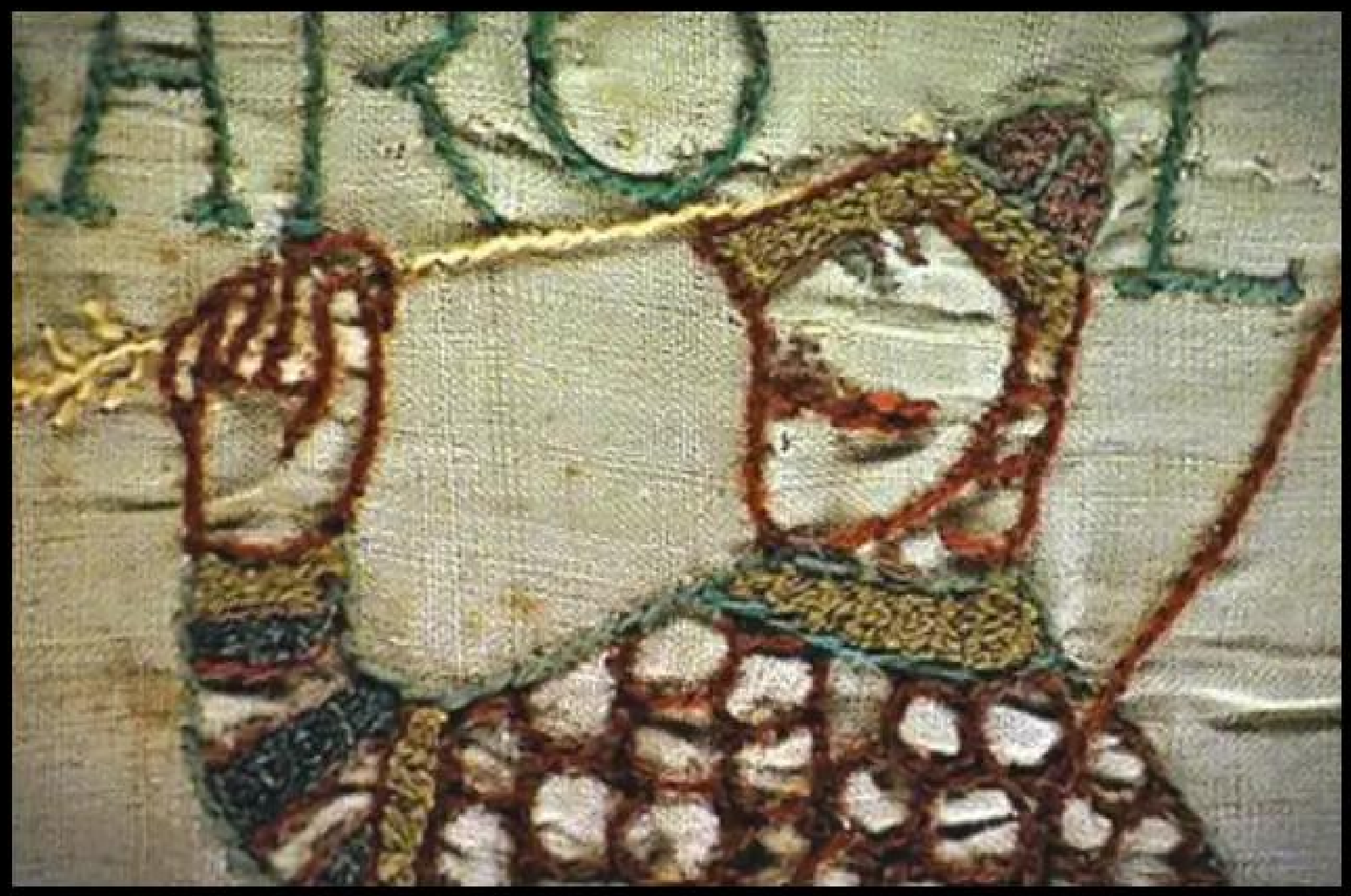




THE BISHOP RIDES INTO BATTLE

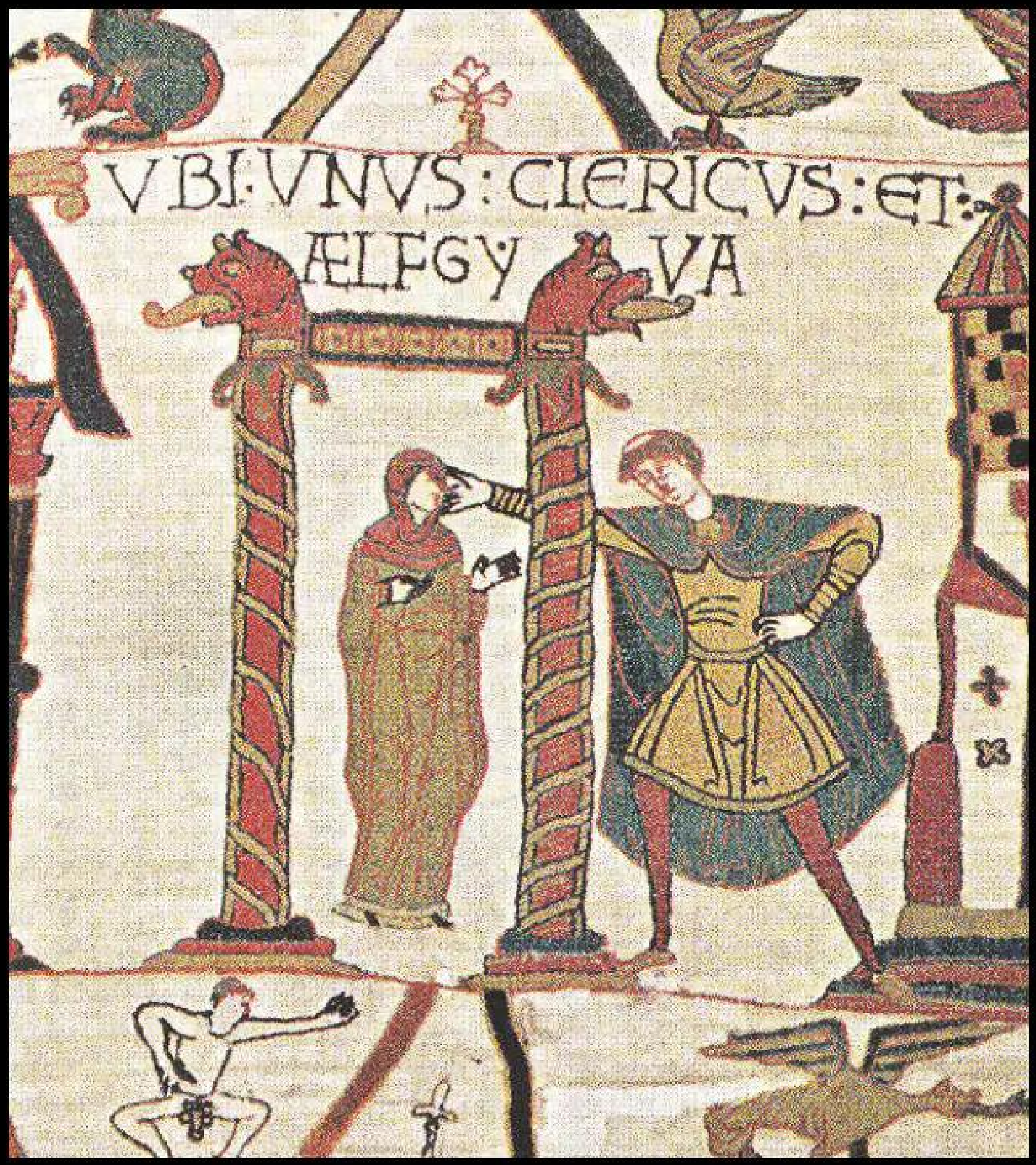
Odo was William's half-brother and Bishop of Bayeux, and plays a prominent role in the tapestry. The inscription above him reads: "Here, Odo the Bishop, with a staff encourages the young warriors". He is carrying a mace rather than a sword, as men of the church were not permitted to draw blood, but they were allowed to bludgeon enemies.

Mysteries yet to be solved



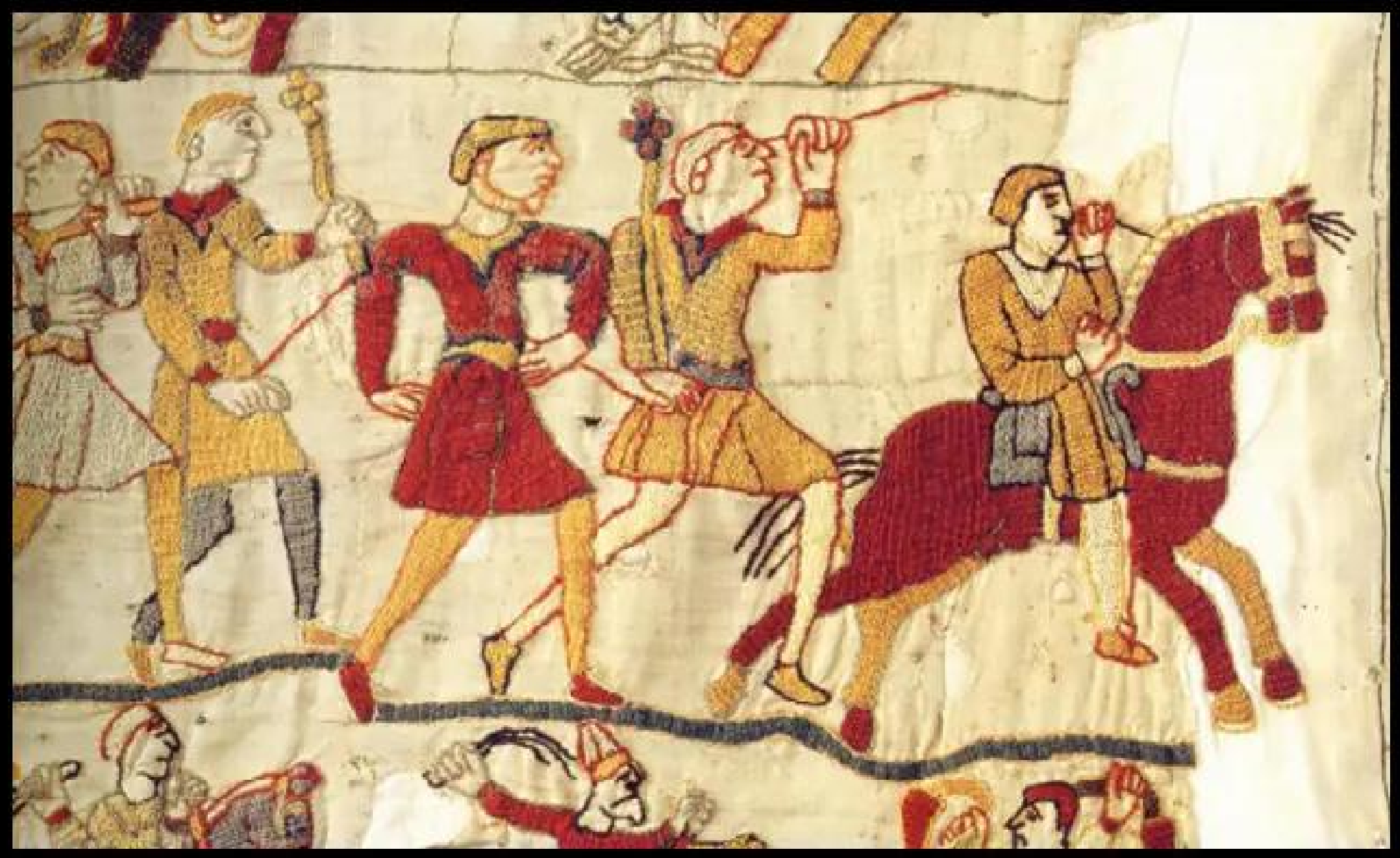
Harold's death

It's unclear whether Harold is depicted with the arrow through his eye, or the man slain with a sword. However, some have argued that the arrow was a later addition to the tapestry, as medieval iconography suggests perjurers died with a weapon through the eye, supporting William's claim to the English throne.



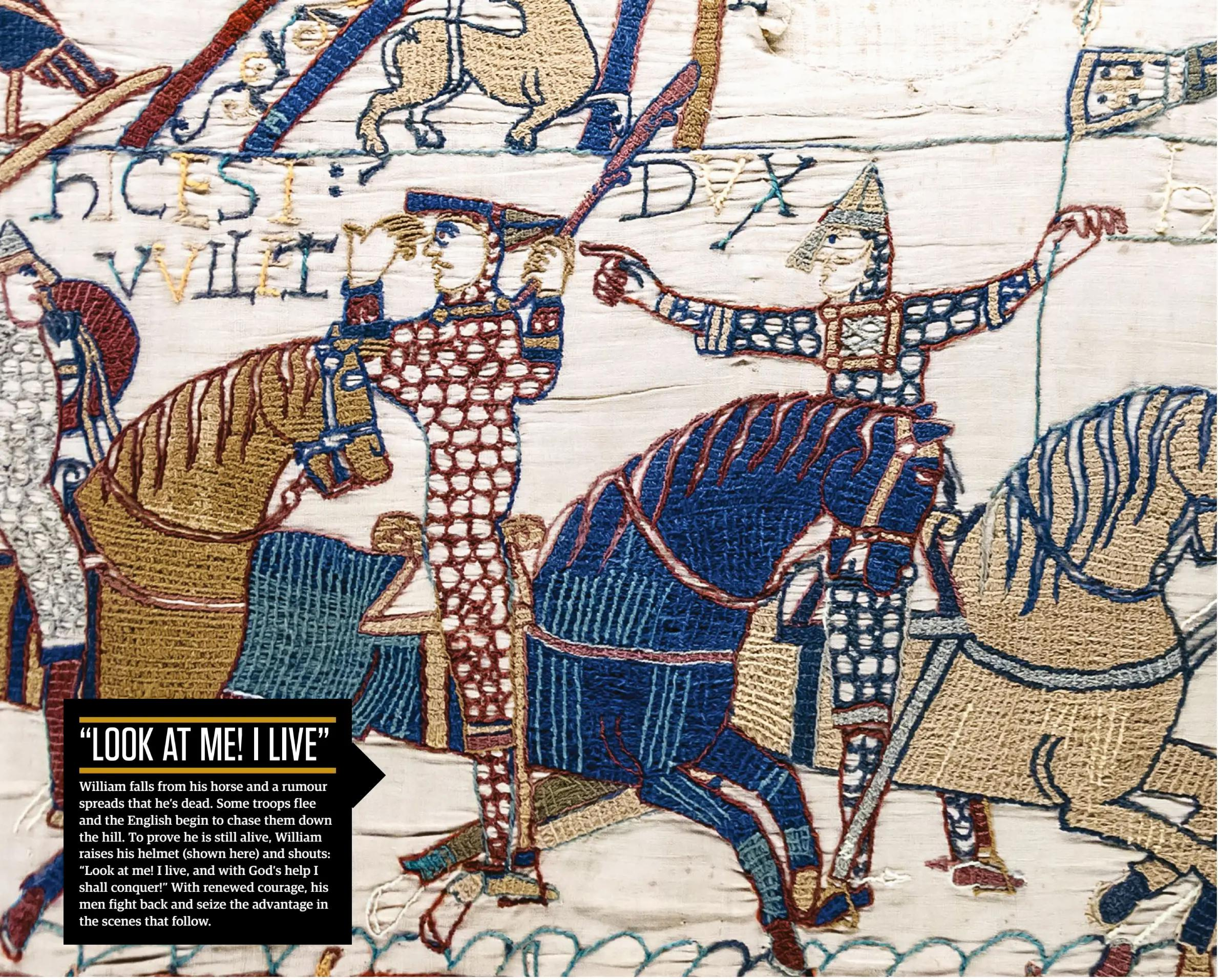
Lady Aelfgyva

There is a scene where a clergyman is touching the face of a woman named Aelfgyva, perhaps lovingly or violently, and in the border, there's a naked man squatting. The fact that this was a common Anglo-Saxon name, and she doesn't appear elsewhere in the tapestry, has left historians baffled by her identity.



Missing scenes

The tapestry ends with the Anglo-Saxons being chased from the battlefield, but scholars agree the final scenes are missing. It's likely they would have shown the coronation of William at Westminster Abbey. In 2013, a team from the Channel Island of Alderney embroidered an imagined finale, to be hung alongside the original.



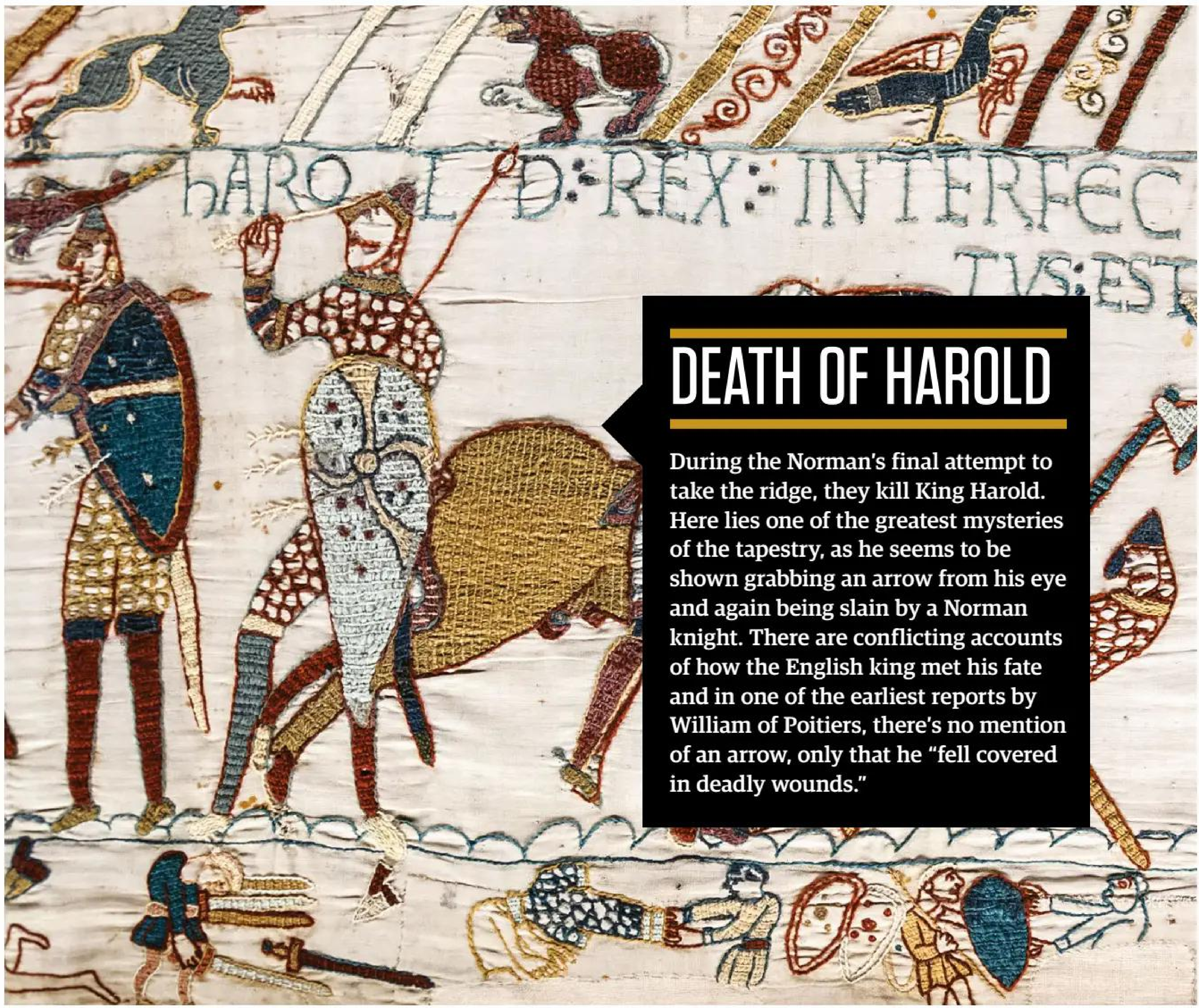
"LOOK AT ME! I LIVE"

William falls from his horse and a rumour spreads that he's dead. Some troops flee and the English begin to chase them down the hill. To prove he is still alive, William raises his helmet (shown here) and shouts: "Look at me! I live, and with God's help I shall conquer!" With renewed courage, his men fight back and seize the advantage in the scenes that follow.

Origins of the tapestry

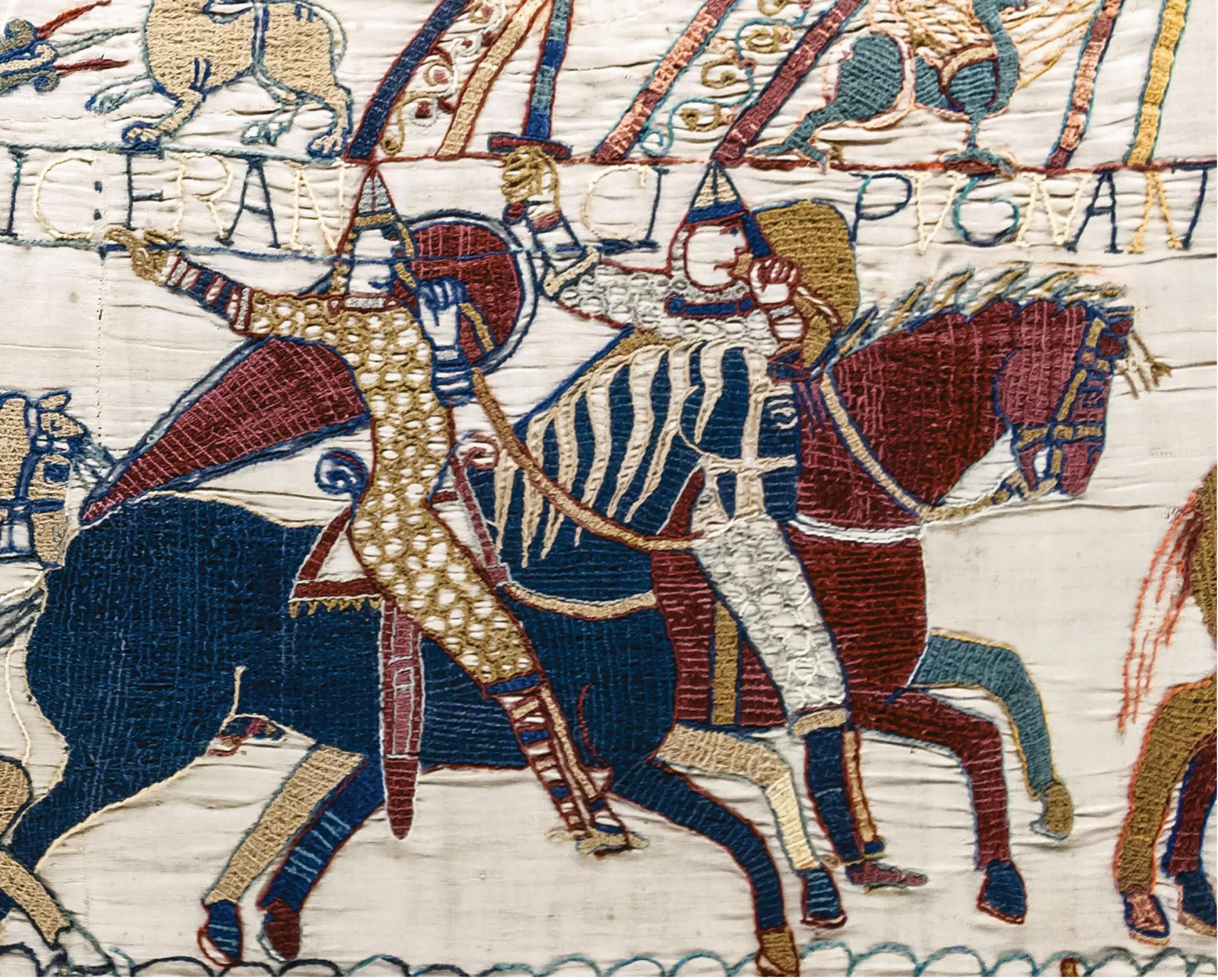
The question of who made it and where has come under serious debate. The origins of the tapestry are a mystery, but historians have many theories. The most popular belief is that it was commissioned by Bishop Odo of Bayeux and that it was made in England. That would explain the significant role Odo has in the tapestry, as he's shown giving counsel to William before the battle, and later, rallying the troops as a rumour spreads that William has died. The tapestry's dimensions and the fact that it was rediscovered in Bayeux Cathedral also give weight to the idea that it was used to commemorate the anniversary of the invasion. If it was made for Odo, then it's likely to have been made before 1082, when he was disgraced and imprisoned by William for making a grab for power.

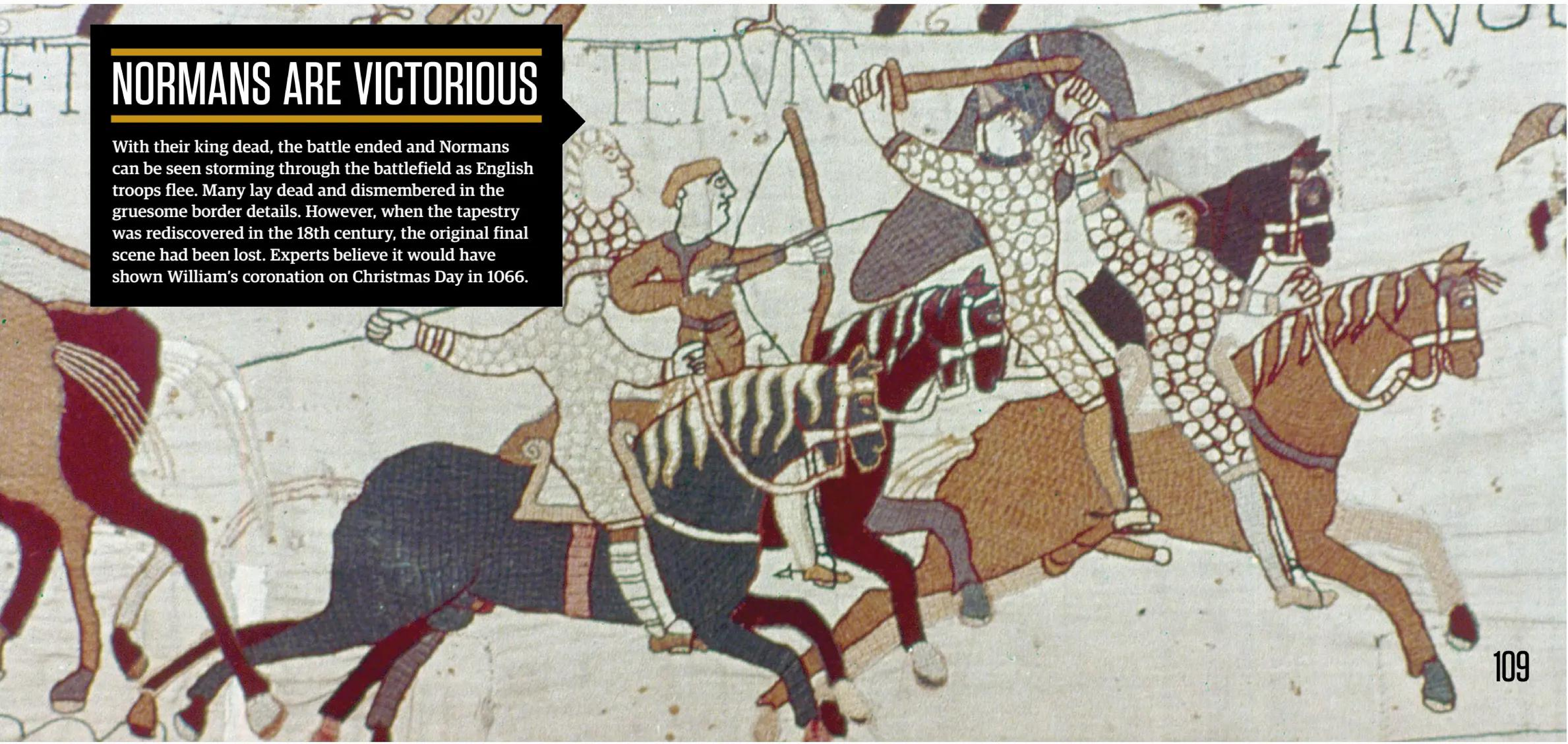
No one knows the artists who completed this painstakingly detailed and enormous work, but many believe they were Anglo-Saxon. English needlework was renowned throughout Europe and there are stylistic similarities between the tapestry and manuscripts and reliefs of the time, produced in Canterbury. The artists clearly had an eye for detail, as the tapestry demonstrates the differences between the Norman and English haircuts. While the English had long locks and moustaches with no beards, the Normans were clean-shaven and their hair was razor-cut from the nape of their neck to the crown of their head. One famous story says that when King Harold's men first saw the Normans outside Hastings, they reported: "they have sent an army of priests!".



DEATH OF HAROLD

During the Norman's final attempt to take the ridge, they kill King Harold. Here lies one of the greatest mysteries of the tapestry, as he seems to be shown grabbing an arrow from his eye and again being slain by a Norman knight. There are conflicting accounts of how the English king met his fate and in one of the earliest reports by William of Poitiers, there's no mention of an arrow, only that he "fell covered in deadly wounds."



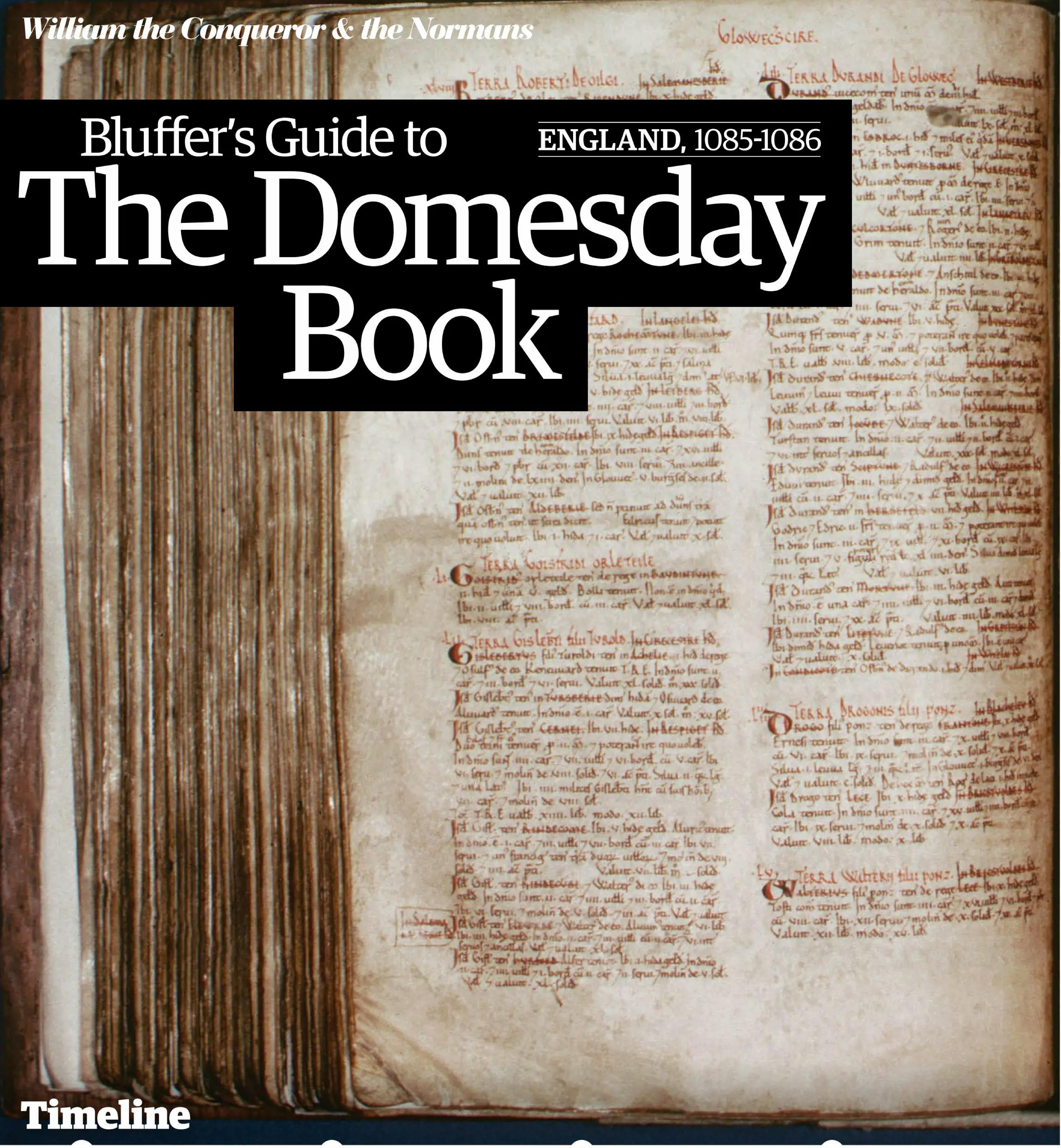


NORMANS ARE VICTORIOUS

With their king dead, the battle ended and Normans can be seen storming through the battlefield as English troops flee. Many lay dead and dismembered in the gruesome border details. However, when the tapestry was rediscovered in the 18th century, the original final scene had been lost. Experts believe it would have shown William's coronation on Christmas Day in 1066.

Bluffer's Guide to The Domesday Book

ENGLAND, 1085-1086



Timeline

1085

During the midwinter feast at William's Christmas Court in Gloucester, the plans for a great survey of the whole of England are finalised.

1086

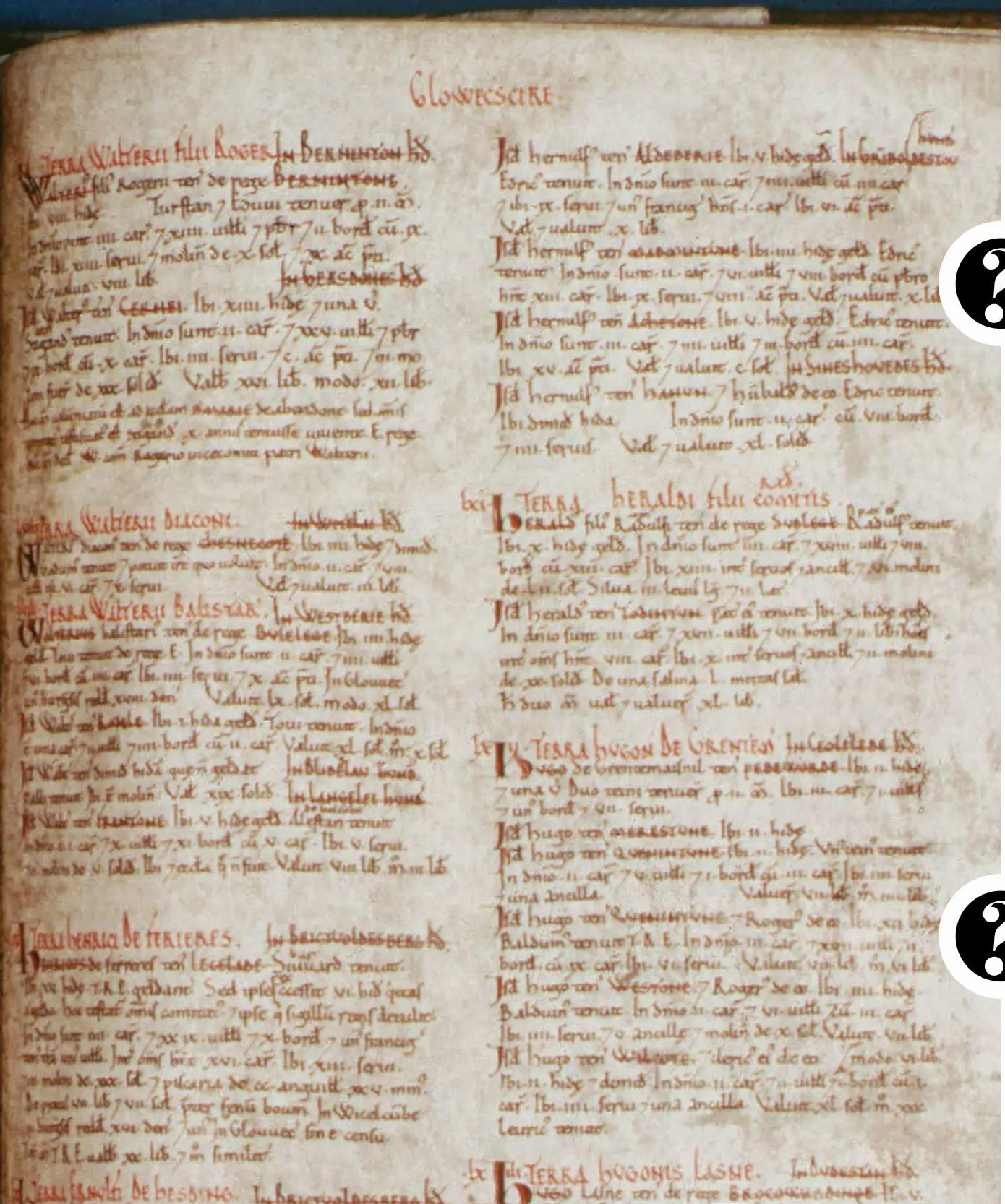
First part of survey completed, covering most of rural England, south of the rivers Ribble and Tees, which defined the Scottish border at the time.

1087

William II takes the throne, abandons further work on the survey and has the results so far compiled into two books: *Great* and *Little Domesday*.

12TH CENTURY

The Domesday Book moves from Winchester to Westminster when the treasury is relocated, probably under the reign of Henry II or John.



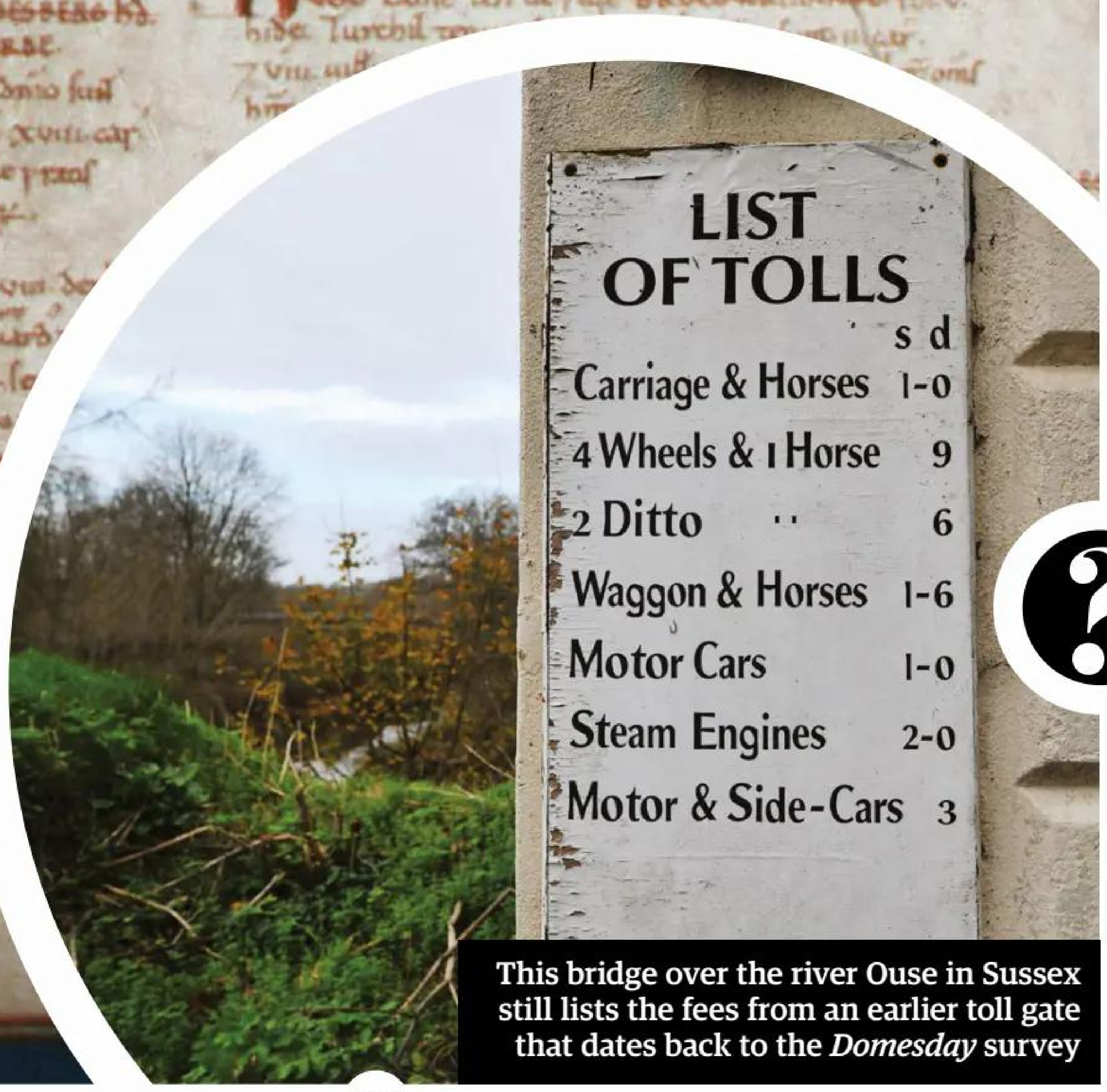
What was it?

The *Domesday Book* comprises 913 pages and over two million words of Latin. It was the first comprehensive record of the landholdings in England and Wales, and the most ambitious survey in the whole of Europe at the time. It is organised according to the hierarchy of each landowner, starting first with the king himself, and then listing the lords of each 'hundred', and then individual manors. For each landowner, the *Domesday Book* states the amount and type of land he holds, and the number of free men and slaves available to work it.

The *Domesday Book* is really two books: *Little Domesday* covers Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex, even down to the numbers of livestock. *Great Domesday* was compiled afterwards to cover the rest of the country, but in less detail. *Domesday* lists 13,418 places but there are some big omissions. London, Winchester, Bristol and County Durham are not included, because they had the right to raise their own taxes and so didn't directly contribute to the wealth of the royal treasury.

Why did it happen?

In 1085, William's grip on his new kingdom was very weak. As well as rebellions from within, the country was threatened with invasion from Denmark. To defend, William needed money to pay for mercenary soldiers and that money could only come from taxation. William sent out surveyors on seven separate circuits of the country, stopping at each manor to assess the land controlled by the lord there. At each place, the surveyors asked how much revenue the land could produce; before the Norman conquest, at the time of the conquest and now. William wanted to know how much he could tax each estate, and whether they might be squeezed still further in the future. Since the *Domesday Book* would be used as the definitive record of ownership, some nobles exaggerated the size of their estate. The surveyors tried to prevent this by using juries of both Norman nobles and Saxon peasants to check the figures.



This bridge over the river Ouse in Sussex still lists the fees from an earlier toll gate that dates back to the *Domesday* survey

Who was involved?

William I

c.1028-9 September 1087

William commissioned a survey of the land he had conquered, to make sure no one was avoiding their taxes.

Robert, Count of Mortain

c.1031-1090

William's half brother. The *Domesday* records show that he was the largest landowner in England after the king.

William Rufus

c.1056-2 August 1100

Third son of William I, and England's second Norman king. He turned the *Domesday* survey into the *Domesday* books.

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The first printed copy of the book is made for Parliament, using a special font to mimic the handwriting of the original.

2006

Domesday goes online with an English translation for the first time. You can search the records for free and see the original pages at **opendomesday.org**.

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William Rufus

The scarlet king

The third son of William succeeded him and stole from the church while flaunting a lifestyle of perceived depravity. It could only end one way...

Born between 1056 and 1060 in Normandy, William was the third son of William the Conqueror and Matilda of Flanders. He had two older brothers, Robert Curthose and Richard of Normandy, a younger brother, Henry Beauclerc, and at least four sisters - Cecilia, Adeliza, Constance and Adela. He sported ginger hair and a ruddy-cheeked complexion - which lead to him being called William Rufus or William the Red.

Not much is known about William's childhood, other than he was educated by Lanfranc, an Italian Benedictine monk, at Bec, Normandy, and his elder brother Richard was killed while out hunting in the New Forest between 1069-1075. As he entered into adulthood, William became thick set and muscular and spoke with a stutter. He also had a penchant for mischief, as one notable incident that took place at L'Aigle in Normandy in 1077 bears testament.

Having grown bored with playing dice, William and Henry decided to play a prank on their older brother Robert by sneaking to the upper gallery and emptying a chamber pot of stinking excrement down on top of him, much to Robert's embarrassment. The relationship between the two brothers was permanently marred from that point forward and, incensed that King William failed to punish his brothers for the practical joke, Robert and his followers rebelled against the king and attempted to seize the castle of Rouen. The siege failed but wasn't without repercussions as the king ordered Robert's arrest, which resulted in the older brother going on the run and allying with the French king Philip I. It was during an expedition to restore order in northern France in July 1087 that King William was either injured or fell critically ill, dying at the priory of Saint Gervase at Rouen on 9 September 1087 with William Rufus and Henry by his side. Conspicuously, Robert was nowhere to be seen at his father's passing.

In his will, William the Conqueror left England to William Rufus and bequeathed Normandy to Robert (his youngest son, Henry had to settle for money). Upon his accession to the English throne, William Rufus, or William II as he was now officially known, was advised by Anselm of Canterbury, a Benedictine monk, abbot, philosopher and theologian of the Catholic church.

His first act as king was to distribute part of the royal treasure to the monasteries, churches and poor and enjoyed a period of great popularity among the people. However, the division of England and Normandy between the two brothers presented a dilemma for the nobles who held land on both sides of the English Channel. Fearing that they couldn't please both of their lords at the same time, their solution was to try and unite England and Normandy under one ruler and decided to side with Robert over William II. The resulting rebellion in 1088 was lead by Bishop Odo of Bayeux, William the Conqueror's half-brother. However, Robert failed to appear in England to rally his supporters, leaving William II to secure his authority over the English with promises of wealth and a much more effective government.

WILLIAM
RVFVS.

As well as ginger hair, William Rufus is also reported to have had heterochromia - eyes of different colours

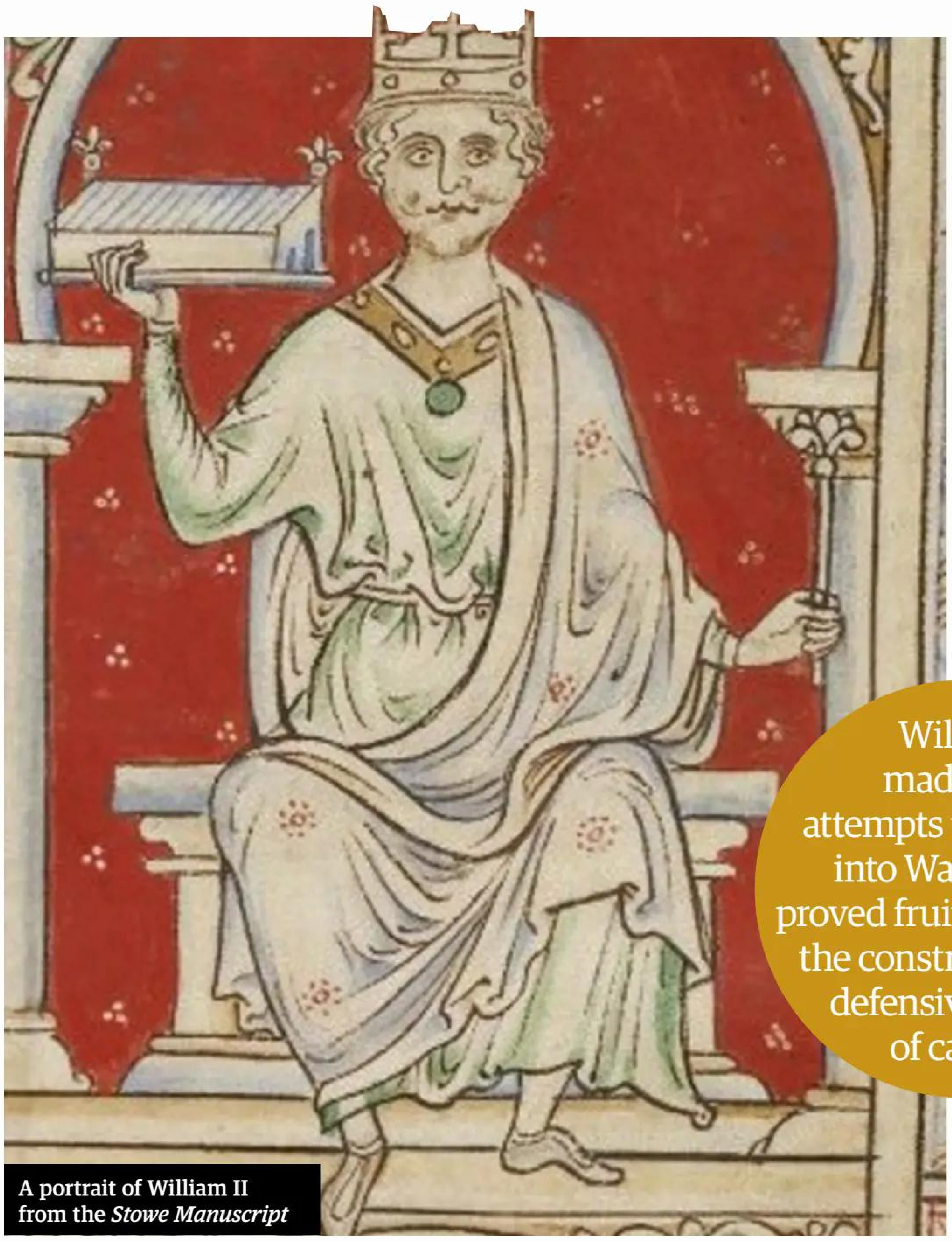
“His first act as king was to distribute part of the royal treasure to the monasteries, churches and poor”

WILLIAM II

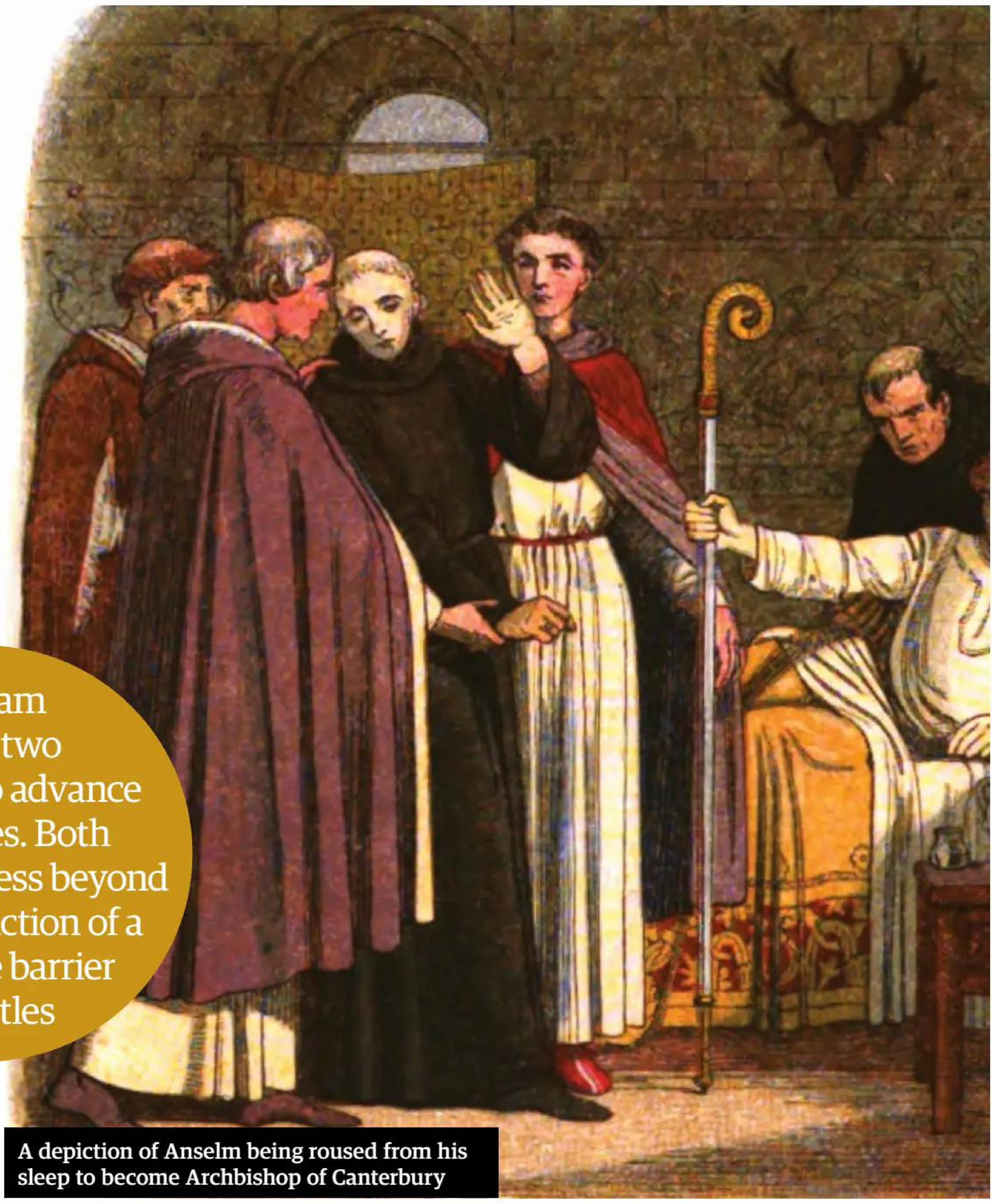
1056-1100

Brief Bio

The third son of William I and King of England from 1087 until 1100. Commonly known as William Rufus or William the Red (perhaps due to his ruddy-cheeked appearance) he fought with his siblings, extorted money from the church, never married or fathered any offspring and died in mysterious circumstances after being struck by an arrow while out hunting.



A portrait of William II from the *Stowe Manuscript*



A depiction of Anselm being roused from his sleep to become Archbishop of Canterbury

William made two attempts to advance into Wales. Both proved fruitless beyond the construction of a defensive barrier of castles

Capitalising further on his support and authority, William II invaded Normandy in 1091, crushing Robert's army and forcing his older sibling into conceding a portion of his land. Amazingly, the two brothers eventually managed to patch up their differences to a degree, with William even agreeing to help Robert recover land that he had lost to France.

Usual for his time, William II was a sceptic when it came to religion and didn't hold matters of the church in high esteem. Likewise, the church itself took a particularly dim view of him, not just because of his anti-religious stance, but also because of his flaunted homosexuality - which meant he never married and never sired any offspring, legitimate or otherwise. According to Frank Barlow, the British historian who specialised in medieval figures, William II was "a rumbustious, devil-may-care soldier, without natural dignity or social graces, with no cultivated tastes and little show of conventional religious piety or morality - addicted to every kind of vice, particularly lust and especially sodomy."

While it is easy to understand why William II was viewed with disdain by the church, his achievements as king held up to scrutiny. Under his rule, order was maintained in England and peace was upheld in Normandy. He even managed to extend the Anglo-Norman rule to Wales and brought Scotland under his lordship. However, while on the throne, he began to display ever more tyrannical tendencies in his pursuit of revenue. Along with his chief justiciar, the despised and maligned Ranulf Flambard, he came up with novel new ways of raising revenue by taking custody of a number of church buildings, plundering them as soon as they became vacant.

When Lanfranc, the then Archbishop of Canterbury died in 1089, the king delayed appointing a new archbishop for many years, appropriating the church's revenues in the meantime. In 1093, a serious illness prompted the king to take action and he finally appointed a new archbishop, favouring the Norman-Italian Anselm for the role. However, Anselm's stoic support of Gregorian reforms in the church meant that the two men disagreed on a wide range of issues relating to the church. As the English clergy were reliant on the king for preferments and livings, they were unable to support Anselm publicly and in 1097 the archbishop was forced into exile and William II was able to add the revenues of the archbishop to his coffers until the end of his reign.

William II died on 2 August 1100 in the New Forest while hunting near Lyndhurst. Killed when an arrow

Timeline

1056

Birth of a king
Although his exact date of birth is unknown, William Rufus was born some time between 1056 and 1060, and was the third of four sons born to William the Conqueror and Matilda of Flanders. The eldest son was Robert Curthose and the second eldest was Richard of Normandy.

1075

Older brother Richard dies
Richard of Normandy, William Rufus's older brother, dies in a hunting accident in the New Forest, 30 years before Rufus himself suffered a similar fate.

1077

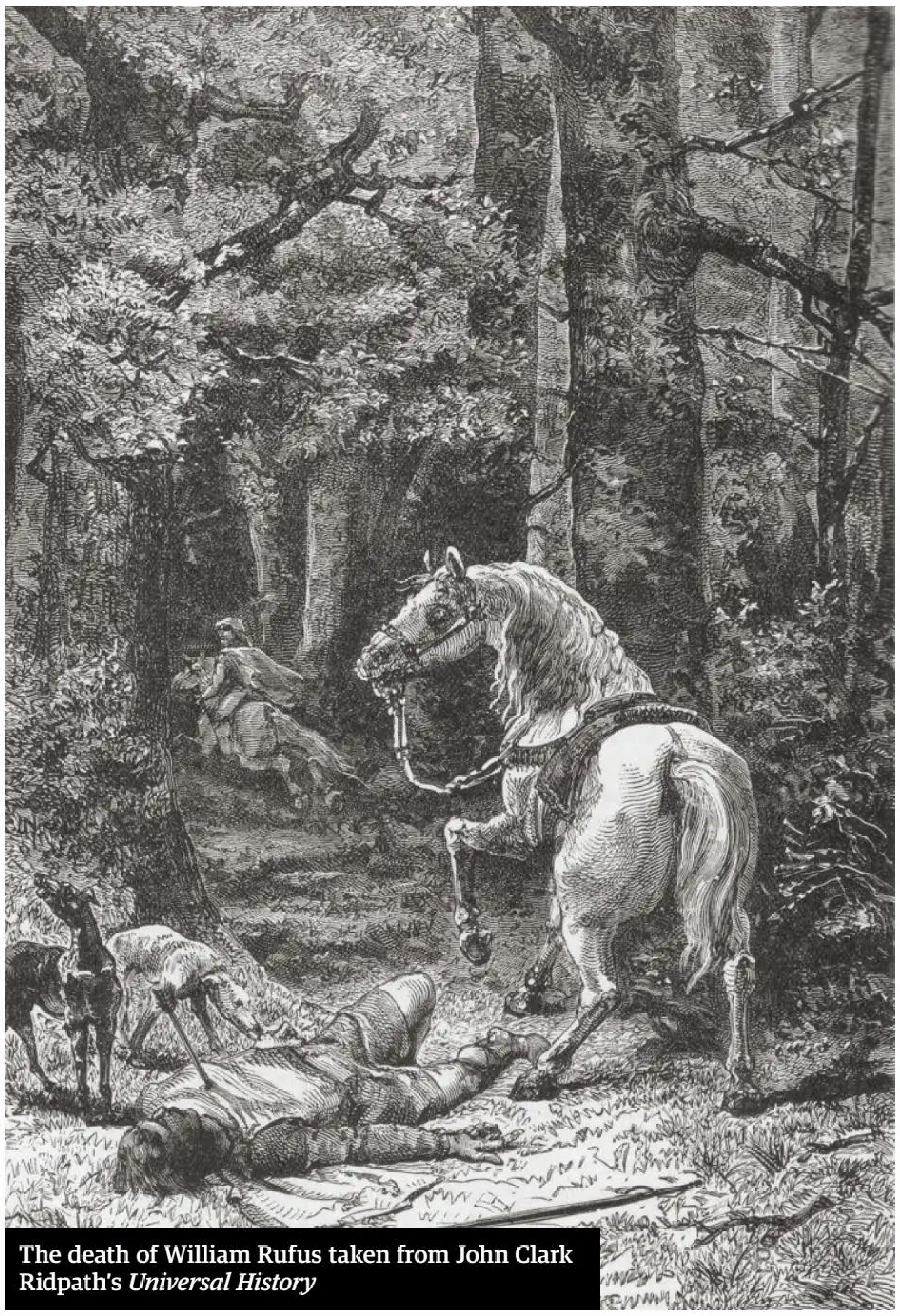
The prank that backfired
William Rufus and his younger brother Henry decide to play a prank on older brother Robert by tipping a chamber pot over him. This would lead to a 15-year feud.

1087

King William I dies
William the Conqueror dies in September 1087 while leading a campaign in northern France. William Rufus becomes his successor to the throne, inheriting England while Robert inherited Normandy.

1088

The first rebellion
With land in England and Normandy, the lords were torn between the two rulers and decided to back Robert in a rebellion. However, when the older brother failed to rally his troops. William II was able to reclaim English support.



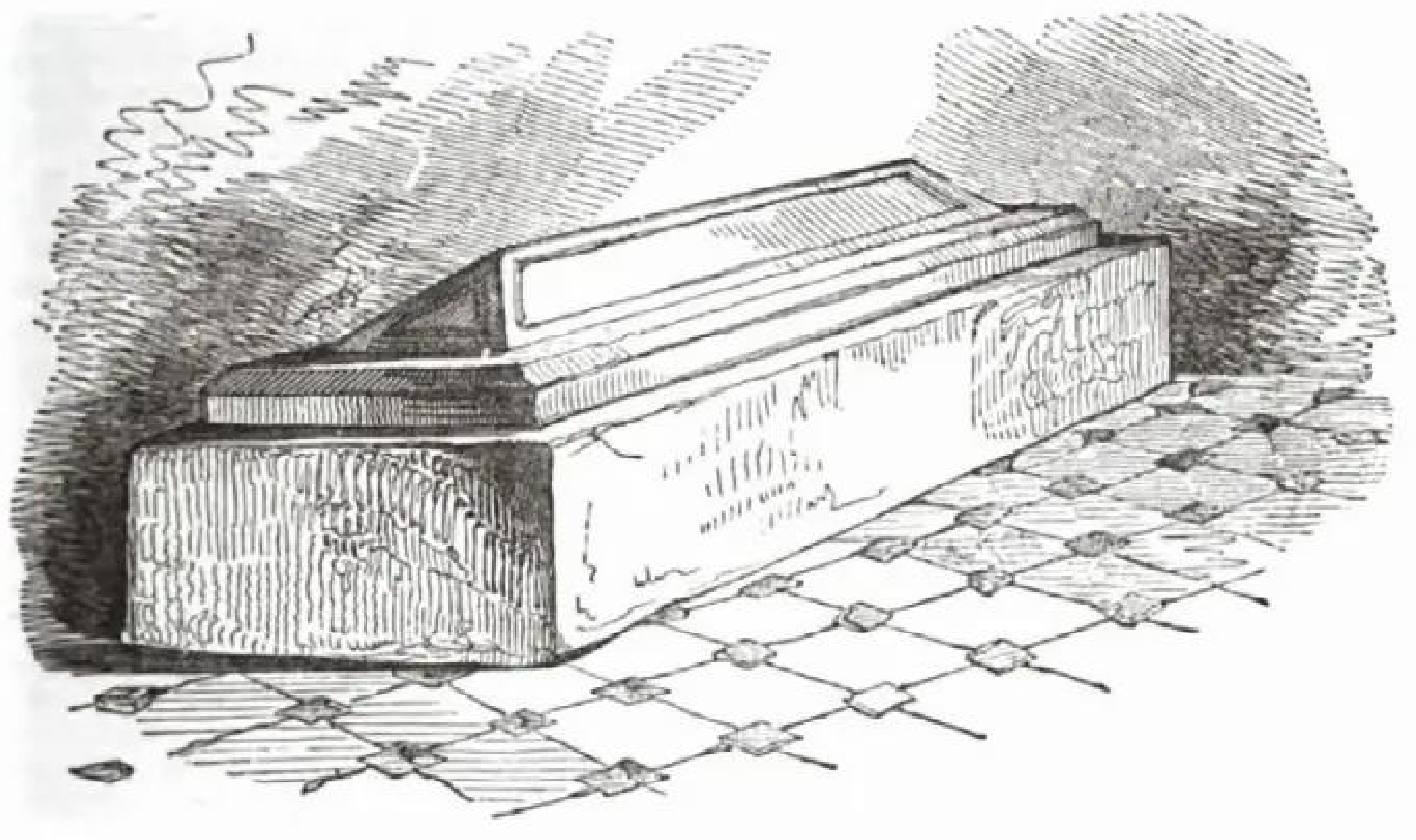
The death of William Rufus taken from John Clark Ridpath's *Universal History*

punctured his lung, he fell from his horse before being abandoned by his men – his body was later discovered by a passing peasant. But was it an accident or an assassination?

Though the men of the church regarded his death as an act of God and a fitting demise for such a wicked ruler, there is chronicled evidence to suggest that the circumstances surrounding his death were more sinister than freakish. The bowman who fired the fatal arrow, Walter Tirel, was an accomplished archer unlikely to have unleashed such a shot by accident. Henry Beauclerc, the king's younger brother, was part of the hunting party that day and would succeed his older sibling to the throne – making haste to Winchester to seize the treasury while William's body was still warm before being crowned his successor the very next day.

However, if Henry did intend to put a hit out on the king's life, then he would have done well to bide his time because another war between William II and his older brother, Robert, could erupt, leading to one of them being eliminated in conflict. Subsequently, Henry would be able to acquire both England and Normandy. Either way, the reign of one of England's most colourful kings was at an end.

The 'Rufus Stone', located close to the A31 near the village of Minstead, is claimed to mark the exact spot where William Rufus fell



The tomb of William Rufus as placed in Winchester Cathedral – his skull appears to be missing

The evil henchman

Many of the tyrannical leaders through the ages have had a henchman by their side to help enforce their leader's orders and ideals, and chief justiciar Ranulf Flambard was most certainly William II's. The son of a Norman priest, Ranulf's 'Flambard' nickname had incendiary connotations and this could quite easily have referred to his personality too. Serving under William I and aiding in the compilation of the *Domesday Book*, after the king's death Ranulf chose to serve his son, William Rufus, when he took over the throne. It was Ranulf who devised the novel and unorthodox method of raising revenue for the throne by taking custody of a large number of church buildings – at one point said to include 16 vacant abbeys – and was rewarded by being appointed Bishop of Durham in 1099.

After William II's death in 1100, Ranulf was imprisoned in the Tower of London by his successor, Henry I, and made scapegoat for all of the unscrupulous financial extortions under William II's reign. Ranulf managed to escape the tower and went into exile in Normandy with Henry's older brother, Robert, eventually coming out of hiding when the two surviving brothers reconciled. He eventually died in 1128.

Ranulf Flambard managed to escape imprisonment from the Tower of London, the first person to ever do so…

1091

An unlikely truce
William II invades Normandy, crushing Robert's forces and taking a portion of his territory. Amazingly the two brothers reconciled and united to claim back territory from France.

1091

Repels Scottish forces
William II wasn't without his successes on the battlefield. In 1091 he successfully repelled an invasion by King Malcolm III of Scotland, forcing the king to pay homage.

1092

Making inroads in Scotland
William II builds Carlisle Castle, and in doing so takes control of Cumberland and Westmoreland, which was previously under Scottish rule. William II and King Malcolm III of Scotland argue over Malcom's possessions in England and the Scottish king invades.

1093

Strained religious relations
As if his promiscuous lifestyle didn't infuriate the church enough, William II also kept bishoprics vacant to make use of their revenues, which lead to bitter arguments with Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury.

1100

King William II dies
On 2 August 1100, William II died when shot through the lung with an arrow while out hunting in the New Forest. It was accepted as an accident but could have just as easily been an assassination.

Henry I

Despite proclaiming himself king while his brother's body was still warm, Henry I proved himself a worthy monarch

Whether King William II died as the result of a mistimed or a well-timed hunting arrow is a mystery. What we know is that just moments after it happened, his younger brother Henry raced to Winchester to seize the treasury and declare himself king, over his oldest brother Robert.

The brothers were renowned for their rivalry, but the real trouble began when their father died and left Normandy to his oldest son, Robert, and England to his next surviving son, William. Henry, the fourth and only other remaining son, was simply given money to buy land and he chose Cotentin in Western Normandy, where he established himself as the count.

When Robert decided to challenge William's claim to the English throne, he neutralised further threat by imprisoning Henry. After the conflict Henry was released and allowed to return home – albeit stripped of his title. So when William invaded Normandy in 1091, Henry made sure he pledged allegiance to Robert, but later lost his favour when he out-shadowed him in combat. Consequently, both sovereign brothers overlooked Henry when they reconciled and drew up a treaty that saw the other as their rightful heir of their respective kingdoms. Deciding he was better off on his own, Henry fought against both brothers in the years that followed, taking land for himself in Normandy. Sensing an opportunity for conspiracy, William sent money to his younger brother to strengthen his campaign against Robert. Henry visited William often at court and fortuitously was present when he died, making him able to claim the throne for himself.

> Henry was one of the most well-educated kings England had ever known, earning him the 'Beauclerc' nickname

Henry knew that, while claiming it had been relatively straightforward, holding on to the throne would be a great deal more challenging. As the youngest son, Henry was not expected to become ruler, so had been permitted time and opportunity to invest in his education. Henry used his sharpened mind to secure the barons as allies by granting favours, promising a better-orchestrated government and pledging to restore peace to England. In a show of respect for his new people, a few months after he came to power, Henry married the Saxon Princess Edith, daughter of King Malcolm III. The union also helped to soothe tensions between the two neighbouring countries. Edith became known as Matilda, Henry's mother's name, to please the Norman Barons, and together the pair had two children, Matilda in 1102 and William in 1103. In 1101, Robert resurfaced from the First Crusade and attempted to seize the crown yet again. The invasion was thwarted and the brothers compromised, signing the Treaty of Alton, in which Robert recognised his younger sibling as the true King of England in exchange for Norman territories. Peace didn't last long and just five years later news of Robert's chaotic reign reached Henry's court, prompting him to invade.

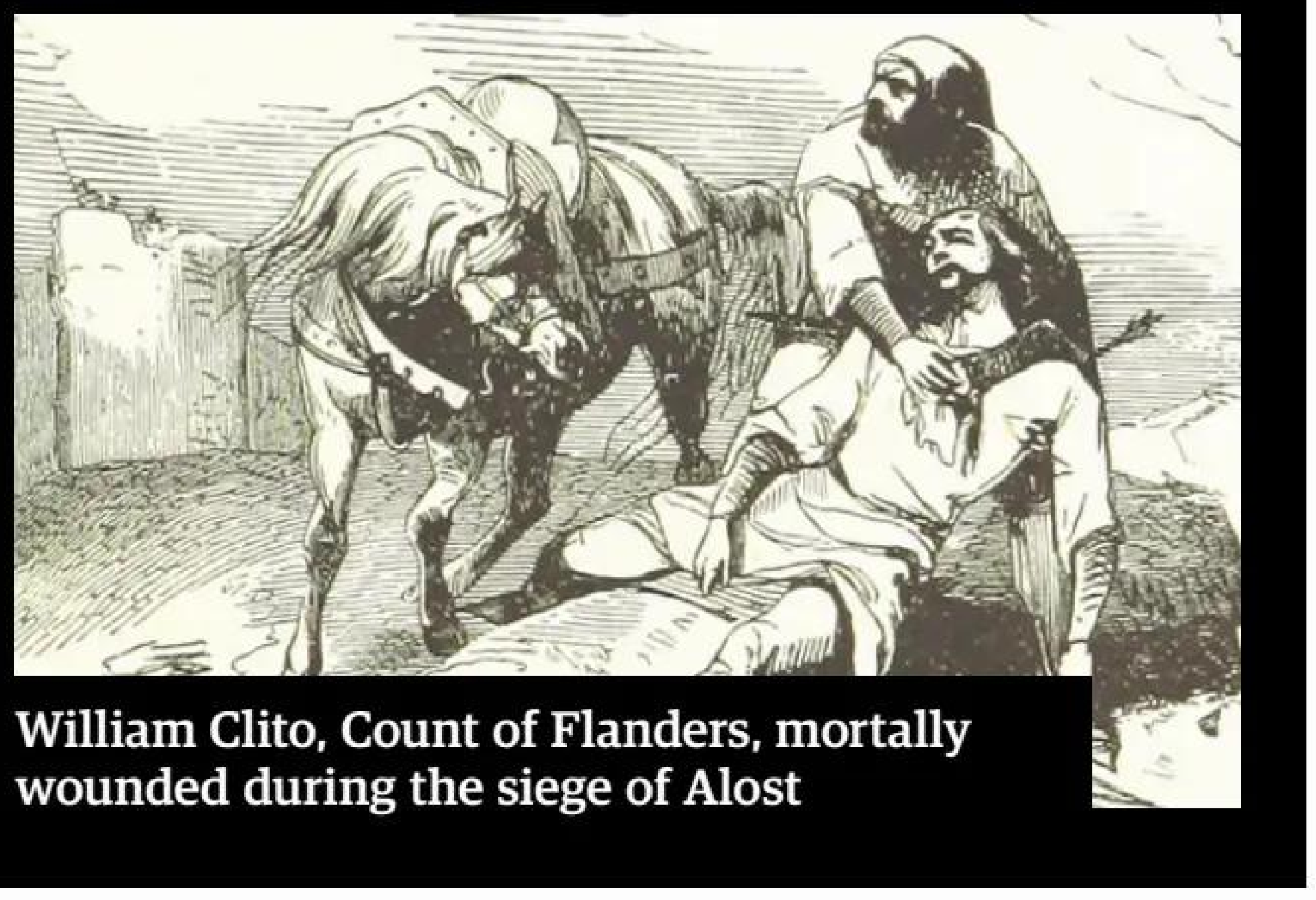
With Normandy now under his control, Henry was proving himself a powerful and decisive leader on both sides of the channel. His preference to promote 'new men' who were intelligent and had risen through the ranks, as opposed to those of high status, proved the administration's making. Henry reversed many of William's less popular policies, making wide-ranging concessions in his Charter of Liberties and returning to the gentler customs of Edward the Confessor. He was able to soothe the wounds inflicted on the church by his older brother, restoring a sense of peace.

While Henry's professional life went from strength to strength, his personal life suffered a tragic blow. In 1118 his wife died, followed two years later by their son, William. Prince William was aboard a vessel known as the White Ship, travelling back to England, when it sank. Some 300 crew members and passengers, including an illegitimate son and daughter of Henry's, also drowned.

Finding himself without a legitimate son, Henry married Adelicia of Louvain. When the union proved childless, Henry summoned his only legitimate child, Matilda, and his grandson Henry (later Henry II) back to England and willed his barons to accept her as his heir. The problem wasn't only that Matilda was a woman; those at court were upset that Matilda, who was the widow of Henry V, Holy Roman Emperor, had married George Plantagenet of the House of Anjou. Although the barons swore their allegiance in 1131, they weren't convinced. When Henry died in Normandy in 1135, the throne was seized by his nephew, Stephen of Blois, sparking a succession crisis and civil war that came to be known as the Anarchy.

William Clito: the true heir?

When Henry imprisoned his older brother Robert in Cardiff Castle for attempting to take the English crown for the umpteenth time, Robert's son William Clito was understandably resentful. So like father, like son, William decided to rebel, once in 1116 and again in 1119, supported by several Norman barons who disliked Henry's 'new men' officials and high taxes. Henry proved victorious at the Battle of Bremule and a peace settlement was agreed upon in 1120 with the French king's backing, accepting Henry's son, William Adelin, as Duke of Normandy. Dispute over the throne reignited when Prince William drowned, resulting in more quarrels and rebellions. William Clito died without an heir when a wound he received from a foot soldier turned gangrenous.



William Clito, Count of Flanders, mortally wounded during the siege of Alost

Life in the time of Henry I

A friendly Viking invasion

During the autumn and winter months of the year 1107, Norwegian King Sigurd the Crusader and his army travelled through, and stayed in, England during their southward journey to Palestine. They were on their way to join the pilgrimage of Roman Catholic fighters in the First Crusade.

Joined at the hip, literally

In 1100, supposedly the world's first recorded conjoined twins were born, sparking interest in the pair. Mary and Eliza Chulkhurst, known as the Biddenden Maids, were joined at the shoulder and the hip. According to legend Mary died suddenly aged 34, followed by Eliza six hours later.

Family of sinners

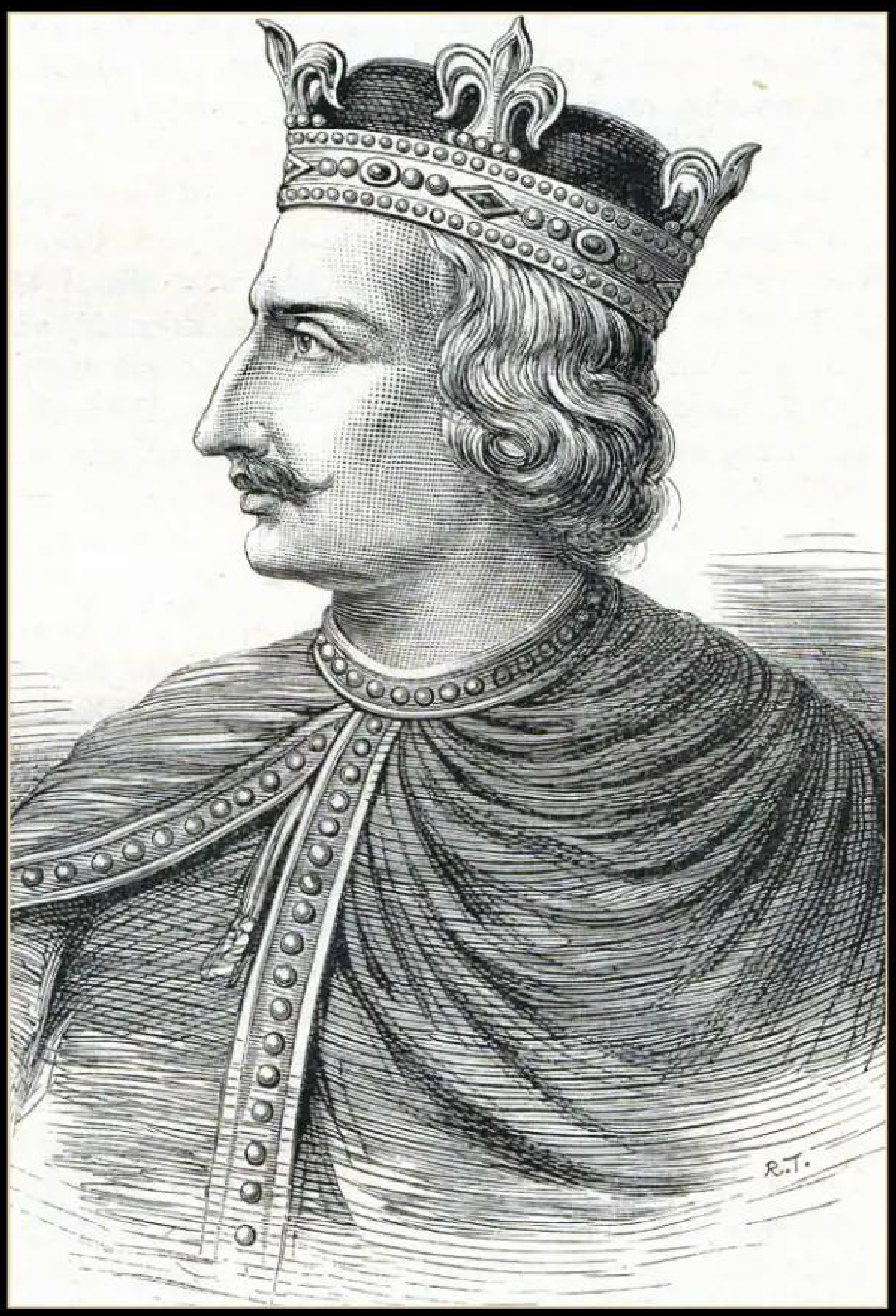
During his reign, Henry I went to great lengths to right the wrongs his family had inflicted, including the construction of new churches and abbeys. At the founding of Reading Abbey in 1121 (which was to become his final resting place), Henry said "for the salvation of my soul, and the souls of King William, my father, and of King William, my brother."

Best-selling novels

During this period, William of Malmesbury, the most respected historian of the 12th Century, finished his first version of his historical accounts of England *Gesta Regum Anglorum* (Deeds of the Kings of the English) and *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum* (Deeds of the English Bishops) in 1125.

Cathedral set backs

Work on St Paul's Cathedral began at the end of Henry's father's reign in 1087 and took over 200 years to complete. In 1136 a fire delayed construction. The cathedral was formally finished in 1314 but was completely gutted during The Great Fire of London in 1666.



Contemporary biographers refer to the raven-haired king as short, stocky and barrel-chested

King Stephen

King Stephen's usurpation tore the country apart with a 19-year civil war. But with little gained and Henry I's succession restored, was it worth it?

Born in Blois, central France, at the end of 11th century, Stephen was the fourth son of the Count Stephen-Henry of Blois and Adela, daughter of William the Conqueror. Adela, who was incredibly politically astute, allied with Henry I during his military campaign in Normandy to quash their brother Robert's son William Clito and his rebellion. Stephen, who had shown great promise as a swordsman, accompanied his uncle in the ensuing battles. To reward his courage, Henry later gave Stephen a knighthood and invited him to the English court, where he rose through the ranks at great pace. The king also arranged a great marriage for Stephen with the incredibly wealthy Matilda of Boulogne, which saw him inherit yet more land in Kent and Boulogne, making the couple one of the wealthiest in the whole of England.

Before his death, Henry I made his nobles, including Stephen, swear an oath to ensure that his daughter Matilda, the former Holy Roman Empress, succeeded him. At the time of his death, Henry was deep in the Duchy attempting to thwart an attack by rebels supported by his daughter and her husband, who resented not having the land prematurely. Henry's death put the empress in a tricky situation as she was effectively now supporting rebels against her own crown, which left her now scheming cousins – Stephen, who was in Boulogne, and his older brother Theobald, in southern Blois – to make a play for the throne. Stephen, who was well liked and incredibly wealthy, was the first to reach England. His younger brother Henry of Blois had become a powerful ecclesiastic in England thanks to his uncle, King Henry I, who had blessed him with the richest abbey and bishopric. This gift had made him one of the wealthiest men in the country. Stephen, supported by Henry, was therefore in a prime position to pay many powerful barons for their fealty, get the church and eventually the Pope onside and sway public support to proclaim himself king. Meanwhile, across the Channel, the Normans were busy declaring Theobald king, but when news came of Stephen's coronation, support for the older brother dissolved.

The early years of Stephen's reign were a relative success; he held good relations with the church and his barons, stabilised the northern border (thereby halting an invasion by the Scottish King David I), contained Geoffrey of Anjou's attacks on Normandy, and made peace with France.

Harmony was short-lived, however, and in 1136, cracks started to show. First, Owain Gwynedd of Wales defeated the English. Geoffrey of Anjou reignited his campaign to take Normandy, and at home, many hard-done-by barons began to play with the idea of defecting to the empress' side. The first of these was Robert, Earl of Gloucester, one of Henry I's illegitimate sons, attributed with giving the civil war momentum, so that when the empress landed in England in 1139, she had fledgling support from a growing number of allies. Stephen surrounded her at Arundel, but foolishly escorted her to Bristol where she caught up with her ally Robert. From there, they rallied support and took control of western England.

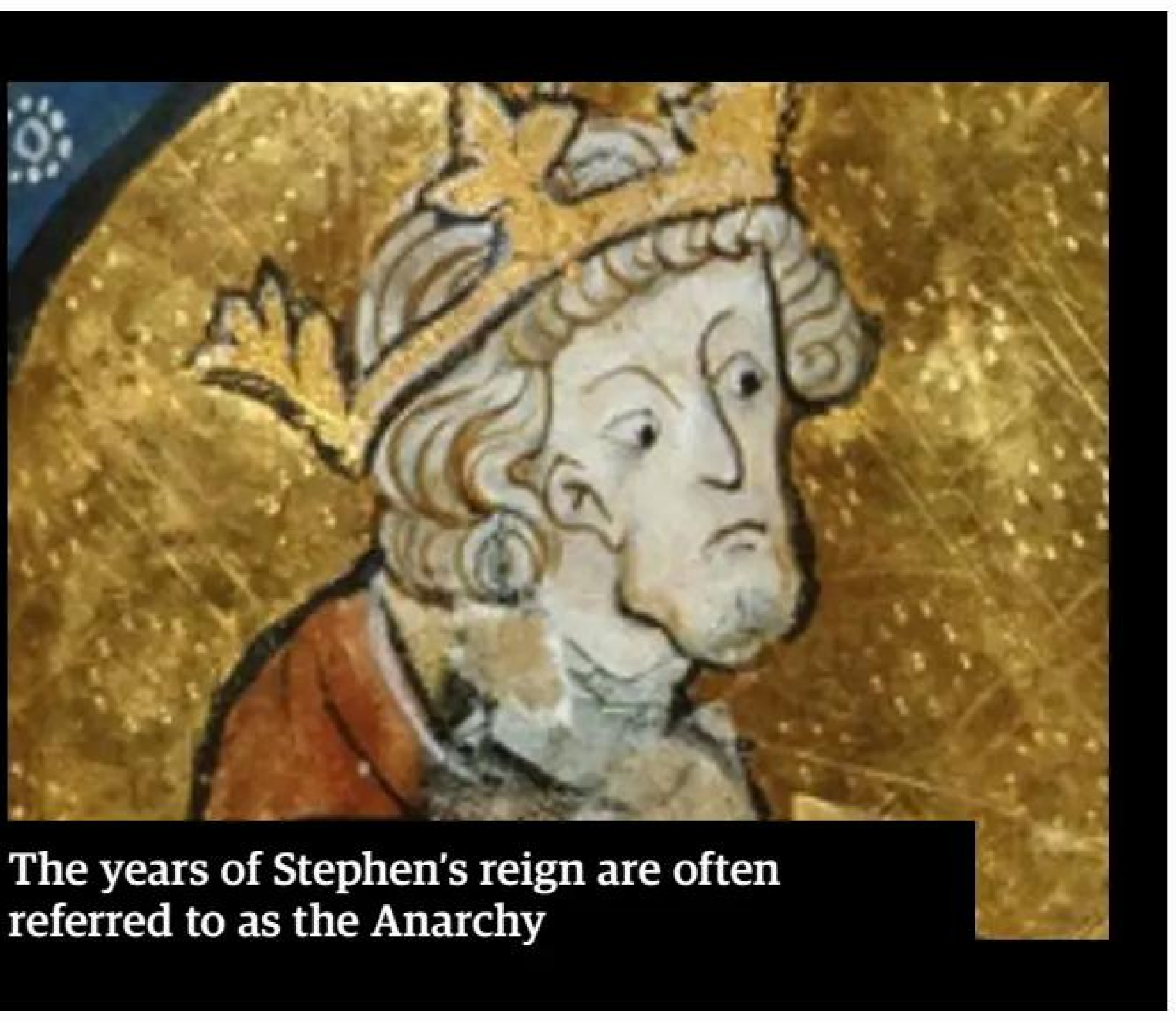
> Stephen rebuked the slur of 'oath-breaker' by saying that he only swore to protect the stability of the kingdom

The next move saw the empress declared queen after her forces captured Stephen at the Battle of Lincoln in 1141, imprisoning him in Bristol Castle. He was released in exchange for Robert of Gloucester, who was captured by the king's wife and forces at the Rout of Winchester. The war dragged on with more sieges and rebellions in both England and Normandy, creating long periods of stalemate, and it wasn't until 1145 that the empress was defeated at the Battle of Faringdon, abandoning her cause and fleeing England. Two years later her son Henry (later Henry II) took up the campaign, but after running out of money had to return home, paid for by King Stephen. Far from giving up, he returned to England in 1149 and subsequently 1153, capitalising on new support in north and east England. A truce was called during a bout of bad weather, and Henry levied support in the Midlands and south-west. The two rivals later met on opposite sides of the River Thames at Wallingford, but avoided engaging in open battle.

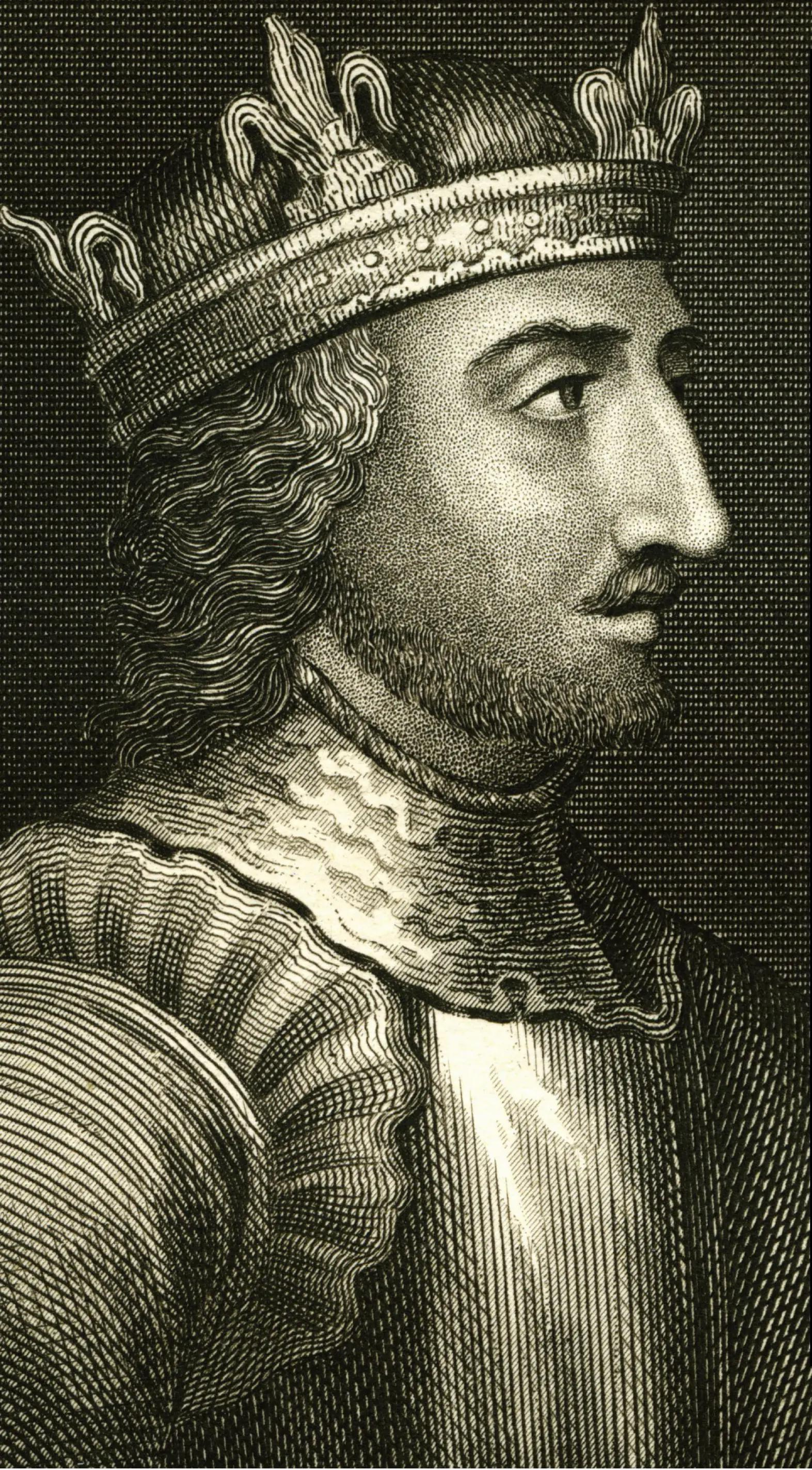
The sudden death of Stephen's son and intended heir Eustace, later in the year, hastened negotiations. Peace was restored when Stephen agreed to the Treaty of Winchester, which allowed him to remain as king for the rest of his life in exchange for acknowledging Henry as his rightful heir, renouncing his surviving son William's claim.

Stephen's early life and family members

Stephen's father died when he was a young boy, and had earned the reputation of being a coward during the First Crusade, while his mother was considered a pious, strong, brave and intelligent woman. As well as one older sister, Stephen had three older brothers: William, who is thought to have been intellectually disabled, Odo, who died in his adolescence, and Theobald. Five younger sisters, plus brothers Philip and Henry followed Stephen. Breaking with tradition, the close-knit family were raised in their mother's household.



The years of Stephen's reign are often referred to as the Anarchy



Life in the time of King Stephen

The White Ship disaster

In 1120, Stephen narrowly escaped death when he disembarked the doomed White Ship at the last minute, reportedly due to concerns of overcrowding or illness on board. Moments later the vessel hit rocks, taking 300 people, including Henry I's only legitimate son William, to a watery grave.

Two queens

After Stephen was imprisoned in Bristol Castle in 1141, England was effectively ruled by two queens: Empress Matilda with the chief support of Robert of Gloucester and, on the other side, King Stephen's wife Matilda, Queen Consort of England, and her advisor William of Ypres.

For money, not love

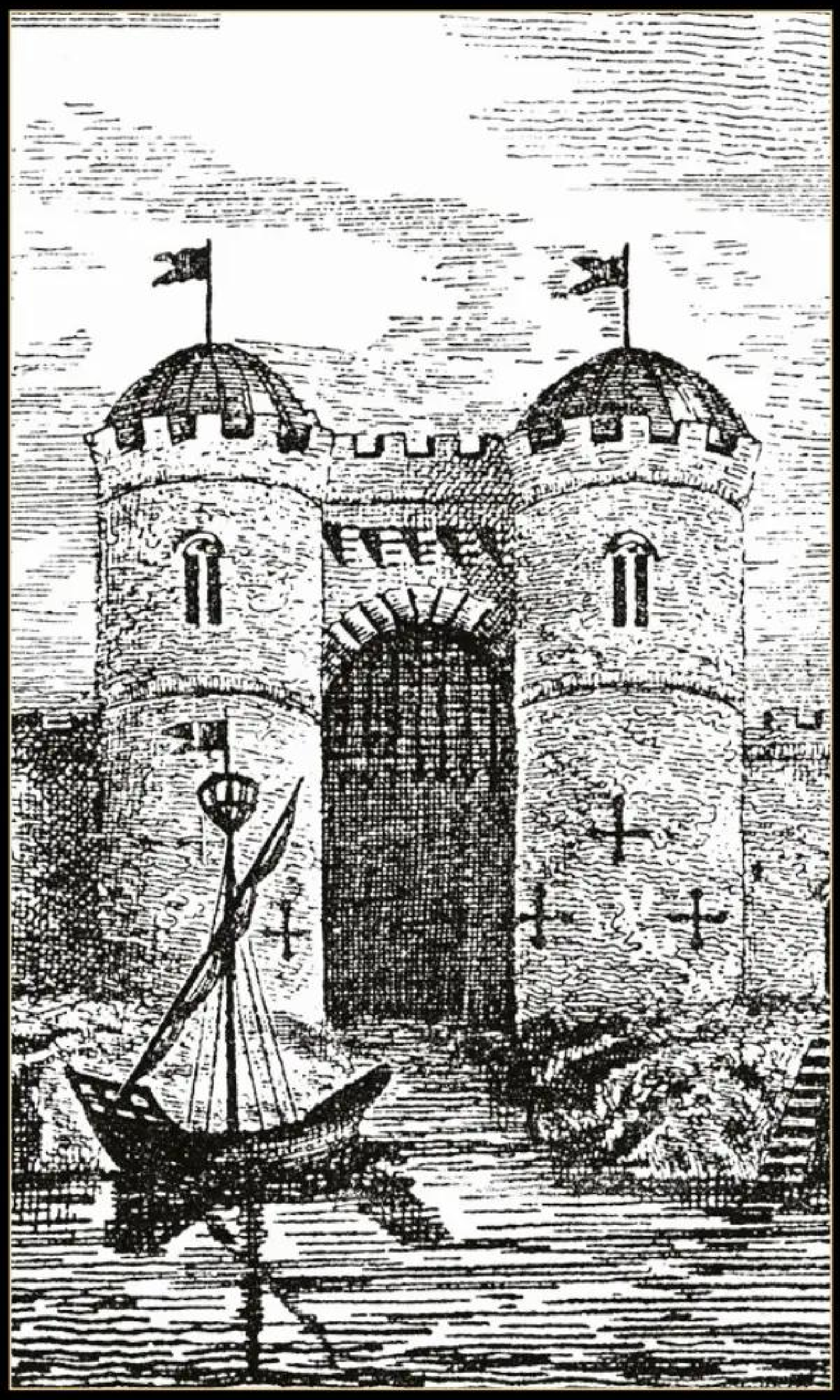
To help win his wars, Stephen paid an army of Flemish mercenaries to campaign on his behalf in Normandy. Eventually, however, there was a great deal of infighting between the supposed allied forces of the Flemish and Normans, which caused the latter to defect, forcing him to sign a truce with Geoffrey of Anjou.

Temper, temper

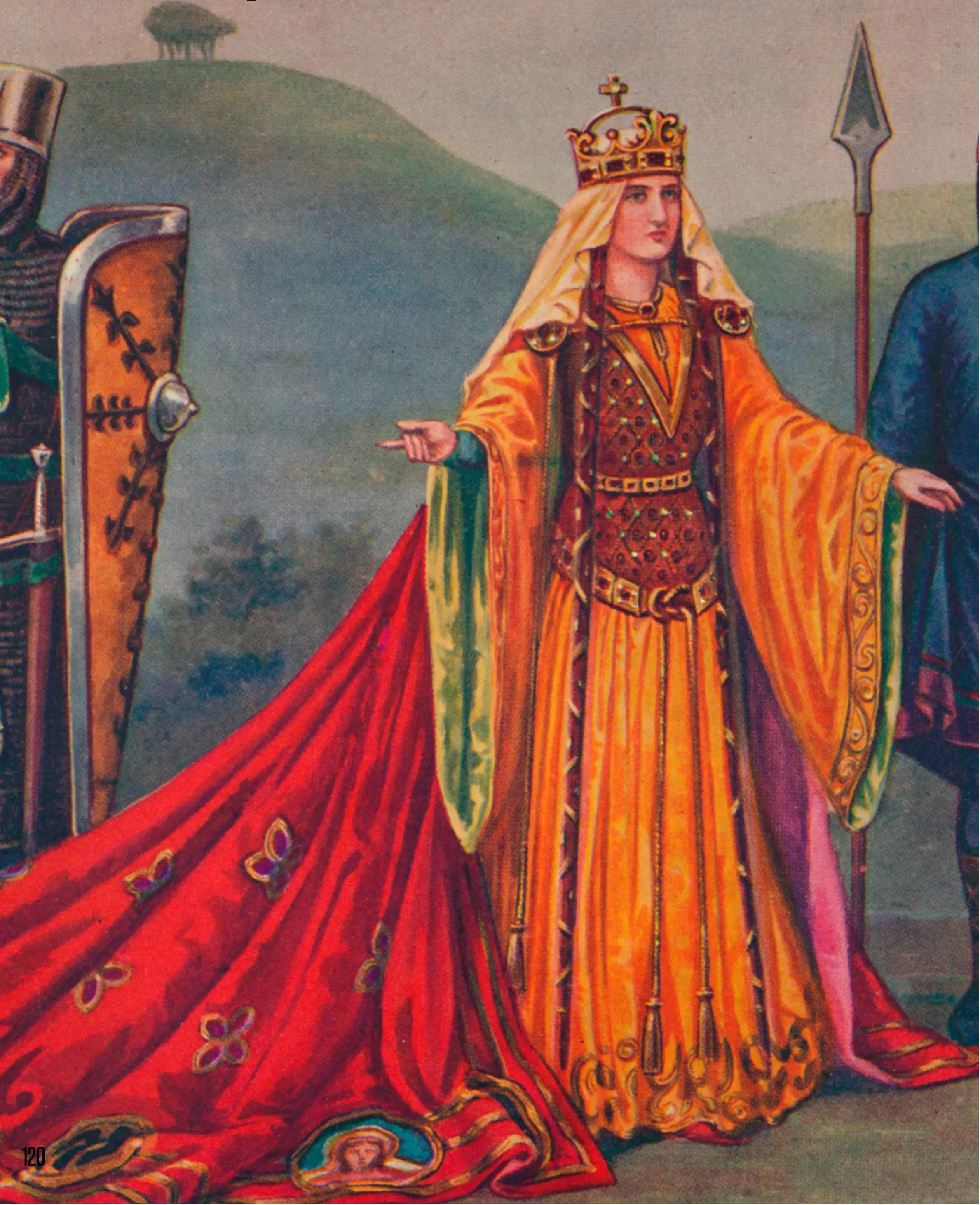
In 1152 during a lull in combat, Stephen, perhaps devastated by his wife Matilda's death, reached a low point with the church. Stephen decided to imprison Archbishop Theobald after he was refused permission by the Pope to crown his son Eustace.

So close, but so far

Despite finally gaining the upper hand in 1141 when her forces captured Stephen, Empress Matilda was never crowned Queen of England. On the way to her planned coronation, she faced a surprise uprising of citizens, forcing her to flee to Oxford.



Stephen was imprisoned in Bristol Castle in 1141



England's would-be empress

How a woman fought for the crown of England and plunged the country into the Anarchy

The life and career of Matilda, daughter of King Henry I, vividly illustrates both the power and the limits attendant upon high-born women during the high Middle Ages. Matilda was the daughter of a king, she was crowned empress and appointed heir to her father, but accepting a woman as their ruler proved a step too far for many of the Anglo-Norman earls of her time, and the struggle between Matilda and the man who took the crown promised her by her father produced a 20-year period of civil war in England that became known as the Anarchy. Showing the political instincts that had sustained her through a long and eventful life, Matilda eventually decided to forgo her own claim on the crown of England to ensure that her son, the future Henry II, would inherit, rather than the throne passing to the heirs of her rival. In this, Matilda proved completely successful, and she lived to see her son crowned as the first Plantagenet king of England.

> Stephan of Blois had pledged to Matilda, in a move echoing the oathbreaking between William I and Harold Godwinson

After her first husband, the Holy Roman Emperor Henry V, died, Matilda returned to England. In January 1127, the bishops and barons at Henry's court gave oaths of loyalty to Matilda as their future queen. Among the nobles who pledged allegiance to Matilda was Stephen of Blois, the king's nephew.

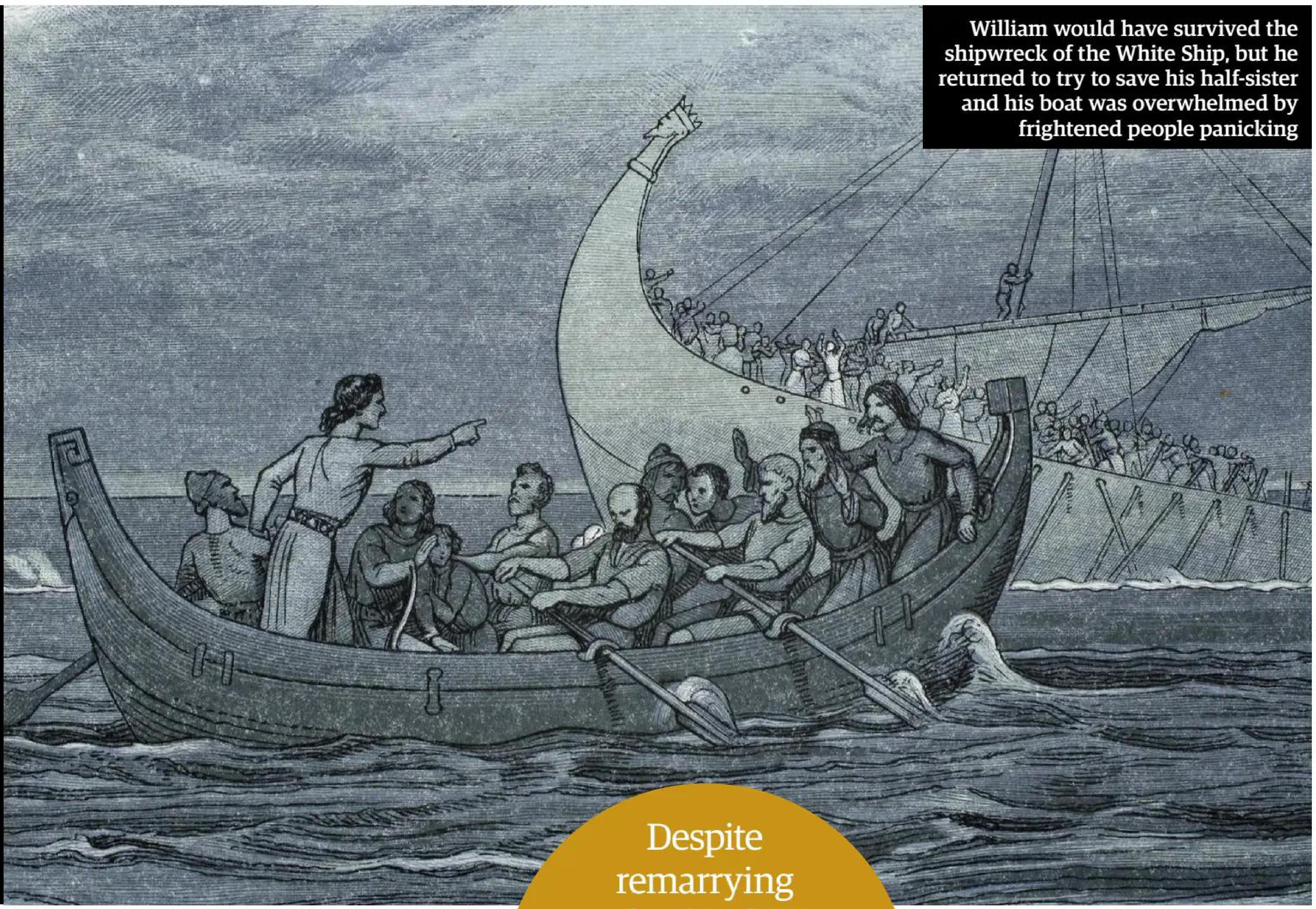
To secure Matilda's inheritance in Normandy from a traditional enemy, Henry then arranged for his daughter to marry Geoffrey Plantagenet, the heir to the Count of Anjou. It wasn't only young princesses who were betrothed in marriage: Geoffrey was 13. What's more, he was a mere count whereas Matilda was an empress. However, the couple married on 17 June 1128.

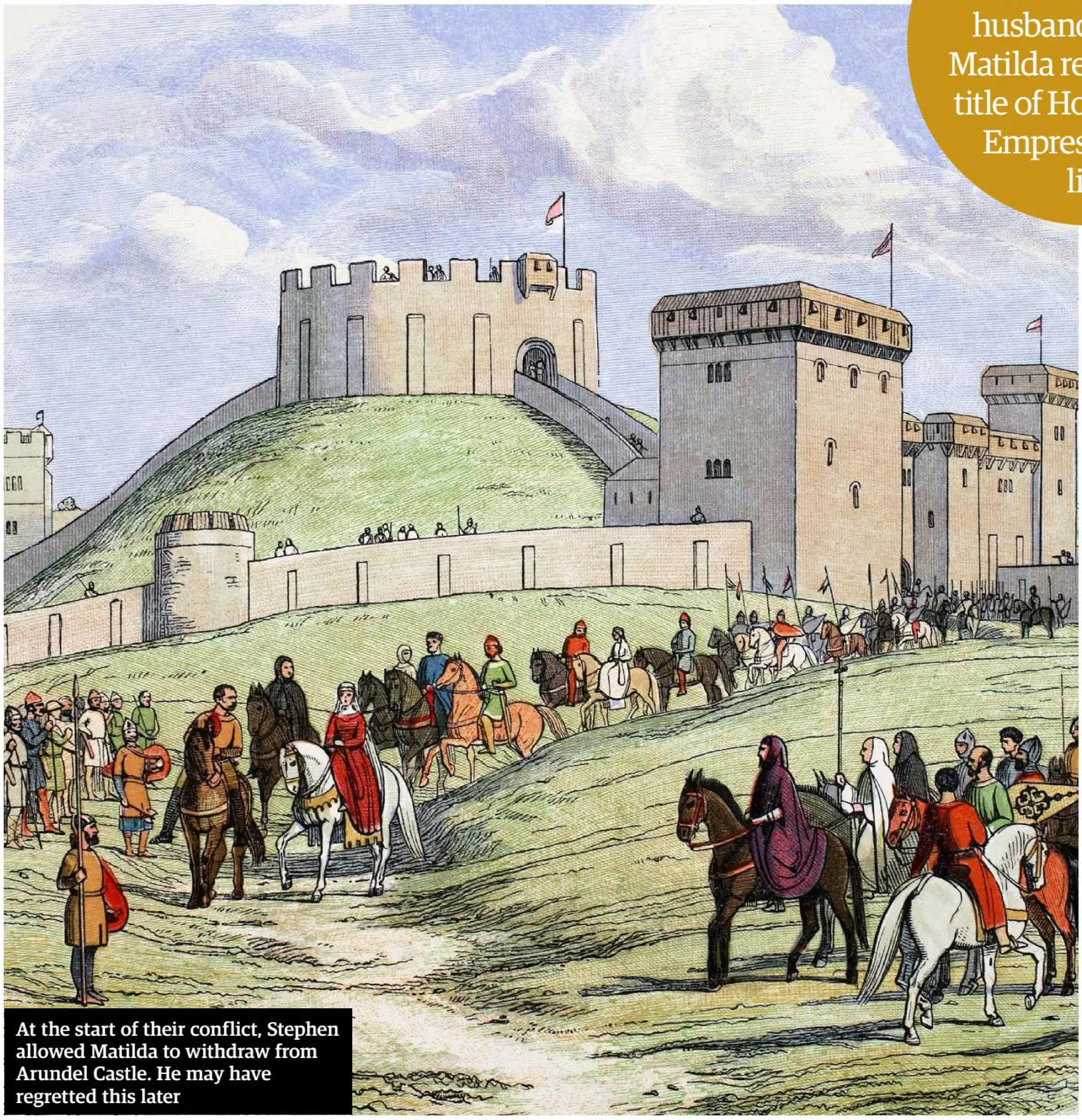
It proved a marriage that would endure for political rather than personal reasons, those political reasons becoming flesh and blood with the birth, on 5 March 1133, of a healthy baby boy, the future King Henry II. However, relations between Matilda and her father had soured when Matilda asked for the royal castles in Normandy to be signed over to her and Geoffrey. While a sensible prelude to taking power for Matilda and Geoffrey, to Henry it would have seemed like a prelude to usurpation.

In the event, Henry died on 1 December 1135. Matilda, pregnant with her third son, and Geoffrey were in Anjou but Henry's nephew, Stephen, was in Boulogne. With Matilda and Geoffrey trying to secure Normandy, Stephen took ship to England and arrived in London on 8 December, where the crowds proclaimed him king. Gathering support, Stephen was crowned king in Winchester

The first Henry in Matilda's life

In the web of marriage alliances that linked and divided the royal houses of Europe, King Henry I, son of William, king of England and duke of Normandy, sought a suitably grand and politically advantageous match for his only daughter, Matilda (born c.7 February 1102). He found a potential groom for her in the shape of Henry V of Germany. Matilda was eight. With attendants, servants, ladies and nobles she travelled to Liège where she met Henry, her husband to be, for the first time. Henry was 24. However, lest readers think this was a child marriage, what was actually enacted in Utrecht a few weeks later, was a formal betrothal rather than a marriage. Its consummation awaited Matilda coming of age. They finally married on 6 or 7 January 1114. Matilda was 12. Young, but a not uncommon age for marriage at the time. However, no children survived from the marriage and when Henry died on 23 May 1125 from cancer there was no clear role for Matilda in Germany. But there was a future role for her back in England. In the White Ship disaster on 25 November 1120, Henry I's heir, his son, William, drowned, along with an illegitimate son and daughter. Although Henry had remarried, there had been no child of the union. Now, with his daughter a widow, Henry wanted to pass to her the crown of England.


William would have survived the shipwreck of the White Ship, but he returned to try to save his half-sister and his boat was overwhelmed by frightened people panicking


At the start of their conflict, Stephen allowed Matilda to withdraw from Arundel Castle. He may have regretted this later

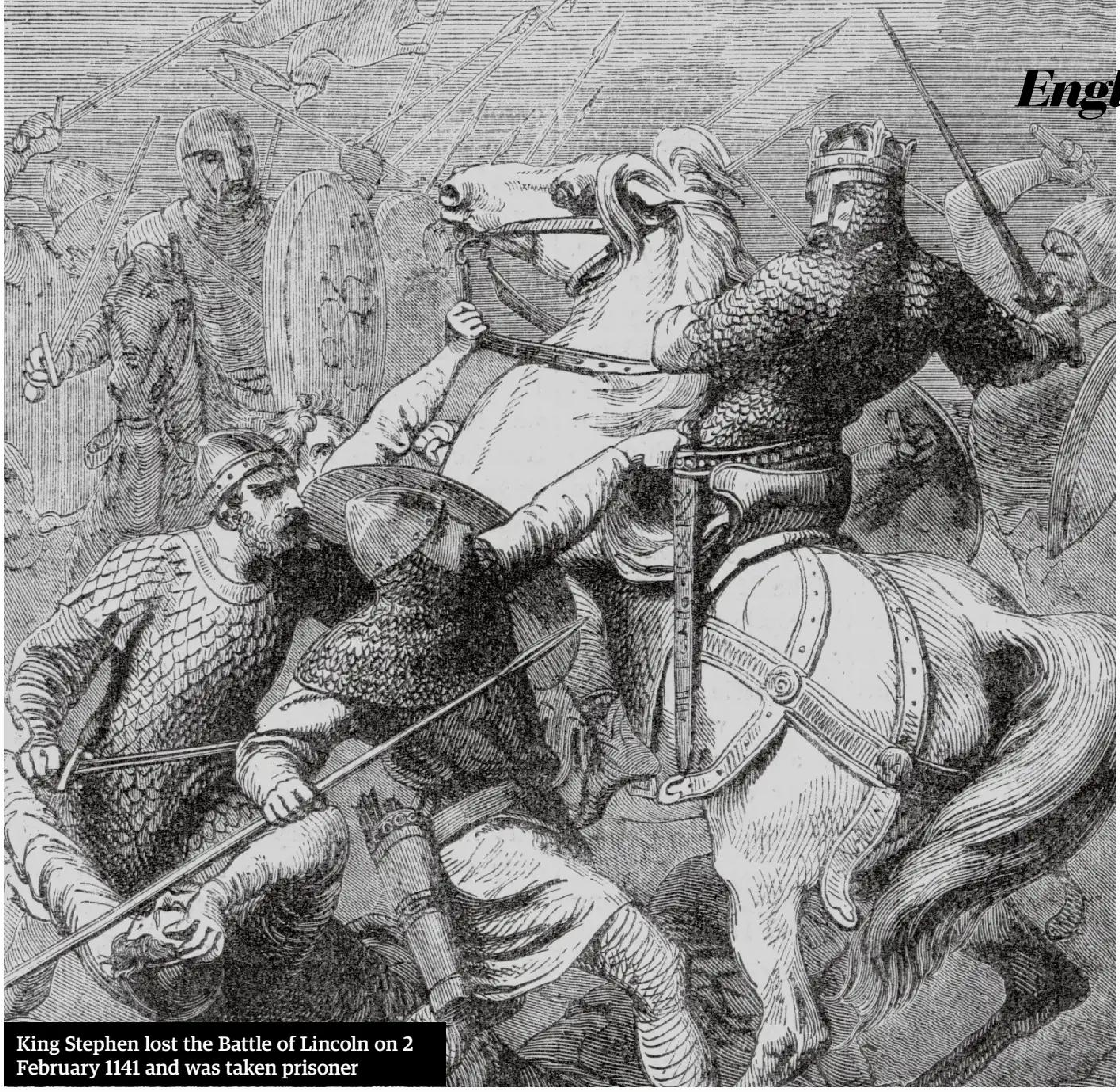
Despite remarrying after her first husband's death, Matilda retained the title of Holy Roman Empress all her life

on 22 December. By Easter 1136, Stephen had gathered the support of the barons in Normandy as well as securing papal approval for his coronation. It seemed a done deal.

Matilda and Geoffrey made their base on the southern border of Normandy and, for the next two years, conducted raids into the Duchy, but Stephen's reign appeared secure despite rebellions breaking out in England. Then, in 1138, Robert, Earl of Gloucester and Matilda's half-brother, renounced his allegiance to Stephen and declared for his sister. In 1139, Matilda appealed to Rome where the pope, prudently, decided to leave the case open to see what would happen.

In summer 1139, England slipped into civil war. What would later be called the Anarchy had begun. Matilda and Robert landed in Sussex. Robert headed swiftly to his lands in the west of the country but Matilda remained at Arundel Castle – where Stephen trapped her. For learning of their arrival, Stephen moved fast, investing the castle with his troops. However, negotiations between Stephen and Matilda were concluded with the Empress being allowed safe passage to join Robert. Quite why Stephen allowed Matilda to escape is unclear: it may have been the impregnability of Arundel Castle leading him to fear that he was tying down his army while Robert was free to raise the west against him, or it may even have been chivalry towards a woman.

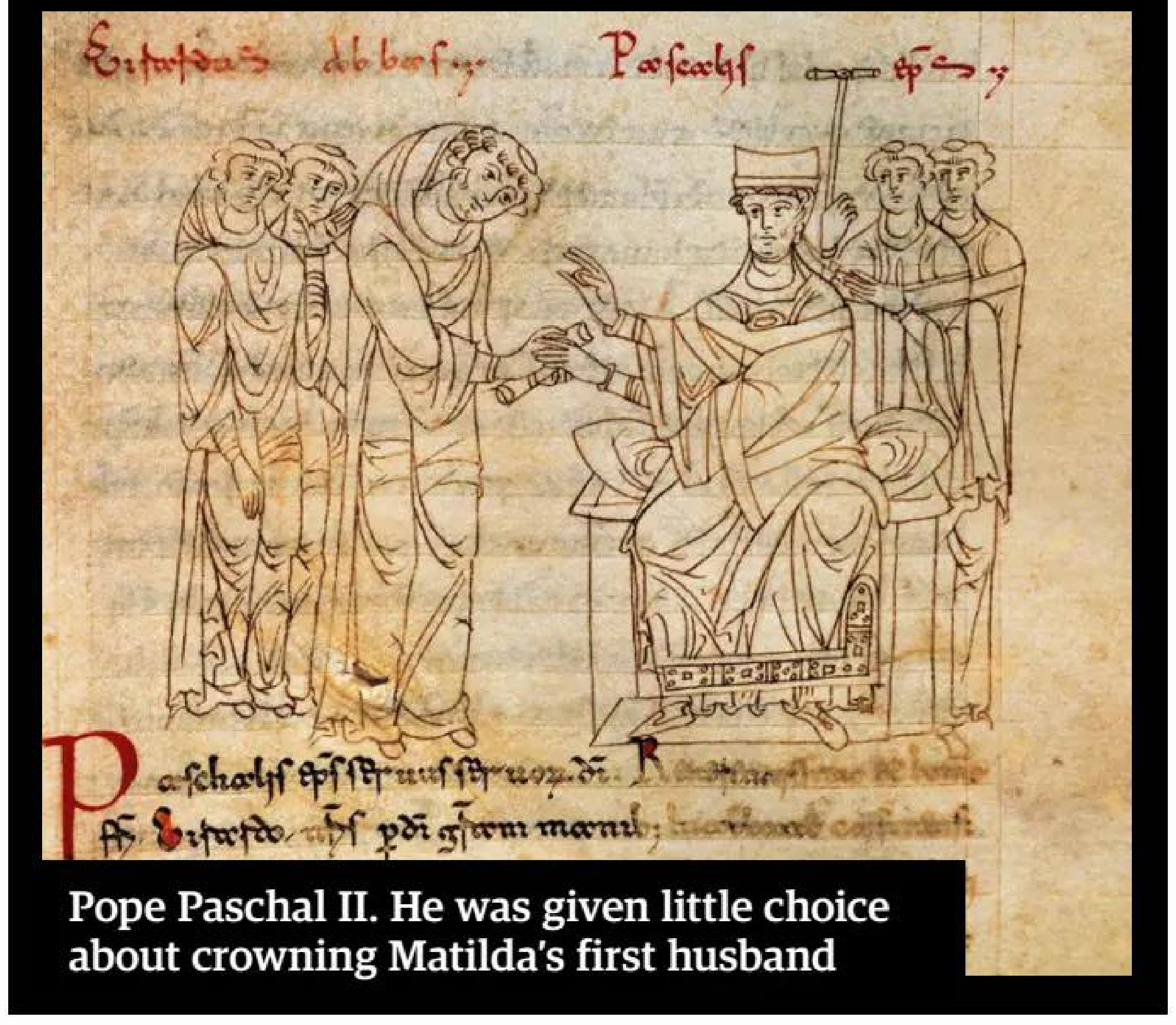
Stephen appeared to have Matilda and Robert safely penned into the south-west. But when one of the northern barons, Ranulf of Chester, changed sides, Stephen had to offer battle to the



King Stephen lost the Battle of Lincoln on 2 February 1141 and was taken prisoner

How Matilda became an empress

Matilda's husband, Henry, was also Holy Roman Emperor although he could not formally claim the title of Holy Roman Emperor until his coronation by the pope. In fact, Henry used her dowry, 10,000 marks in silver, to finance a suitably imperial procession to Rome for the coronation. Leaving Matilda in Germany, learning the language, laws and customs of the people she was to rule as queen and empress, her betrothed made his way to Rome for his coronation. However, relations between the putative Holy Roman Emperor and the pope had become strained and the coronation went a little awry: it ended in an armed struggle in St Peter's Basilica in which Henry was wounded before making his retreat with the pope and 16 cardinals as his captives. When a Norman relief force failed to free him, Pope Paschal II had little choice but to agree to crown Henry, which he did on 13 April 1111. Henry returned to Italy in 1116, taking Matilda with him this time, but Pope Paschal did not wait around in Rome for the Emperor's arrival. In the Eternal City, Henry made judicious donations to various cardinals and Henry and Matilda were crowned Emperor and Empress in St Peter's Basilica, probably on two separate occasions, Easter and Pentecost 1117. Matilda, in all the charters she signed to the end of her life, always called herself empress, and no contemporary ever challenged her right to the title.



Pope Paschal II. He was given little choice about crowning Matilda's first husband

combined forces of Robert and Ranulf. The Battle of Lincoln on 2 February 1141 was a disastrous defeat for Stephen, culminating with him being taken prisoner and brought before Matilda in Gloucester. Stephen was taken for custody to Bristol Castle.

The crown now seemed in Matilda's grasp. She was declared 'Lady of England and Normandy' and in June Matilda arrived in London for her coronation. But across the river was another formidable Matilda, wife and queen to Stephen, with an encamped army. Then the city rose against the Empress, and Matilda had to make a hasty retreat to Oxford.

In a war that had seen rapidly changing fortunes, the following two months were dizzying. Matilda and Robert's forces invested Winchester, only to be surrounded in turn by an army led by Queen Matilda, Stephen's wife. Rather than be starved out, Robert and Matilda decided upon a fighting retreat. The fight proved harder than they had imagined, with Queen Matilda's forces pressing them hard. Empress Matilda had to ride for her life, astride a horse like a man. For his part, Robert of Gloucester led the rearguard, ensuring that his half-sister escaped, but he was himself captured.

So now Stephen, the crowned king of England, was a captive of the Empress Matilda, while Robert, her half-brother, was the prisoner of Queen Matilda, Stephen's wife. With such valuable prisoners on each side, talks began, while Queen Matilda tried to persuade Robert to change sides. In the end, both sides held firm, so the outcome was simply a prisoner exchange: Stephen and Robert were freed.

In June 1142, Earl Robert crossed the Channel to ask Matilda's husband, Geoffrey, for help, leaving the Empress safe in Oxford Castle. Or so he thought. But before Robert could return, Stephen laid siege to the castle, investing it for three months. With the castle on the brink of falling, and the land in the iron grip of winter, Matilda decided to make her escape. Putting on a white cloak, which would camouflage her against the snow, Matilda slipped out of the postern gate, crossed the frozen River Thames and made her getaway. The Empress headed to the impregnable Devizes Castle, which became her base for the next six years.

The war had become a stalemate. Neither side could gain a decisive advantage. The damage caused to the wider country by the long struggle was made evident by the name given by chroniclers to this period: the Anarchy. By the latter part of the decade, the conflict began to peter out. Matilda's great supporter, her half-brother, Robert, Earl of Gloucester, died in 1147 from natural causes. And in 1148, Matilda herself left England and returned to Normandy. Her son, Henry, was now 15 and beginning to take an active role in claiming what his mother regarded as his inheritance. Matilda settled south of Rouen at the priory of Notre Dame du Pré, where she would spend the remaining 19 years of her life, administering her son's possessions in Normandy.

For his part, Stephen had been trying to arrange for his eldest son, Eustace, to be recognised as heir to the throne. But the Church and the nobility, after 15 years of warfare, were reluctant: they wanted a negotiated settlement to which all would agree. When Henry, son of Matilda, landed in England in 1153, it seemed like the contest would be finally settled by battle. However, when the two armies faced each other at Wallingford the respective barons and earls were none too keen on battle, and the church brokered a temporary truce. Then, in timely fashion for all but him, Stephen's son, Eustace, died. In November, Stephen and Henry met at Winchester and agreed the Treaty of Winchester. Under its terms, Stephen adopted Henry as his son and heir, Henry did homage to Stephen as rightful king, while Stephen's remaining son renounced his claim to the throne in return for guarantees on his land and possessions.

The war was over. At least on paper. It ended in practice when King Stephen died on 25 October 1154. Henry, Matilda's son, was crowned the first Plantagenet king of England on 19 December 1154. His mother never returned to England, but she lived on at her priory outside Rouen for another 13 years, dying on 10 September 1167. On her grave was written: "Ortu magna, viro major, sed maxima partu, Hic jacet Henrici filia, sponsa, parens." ('Great by birth, greater by marriage, greatest in her offspring, here lies the daughter, wife, and mother of Henry').

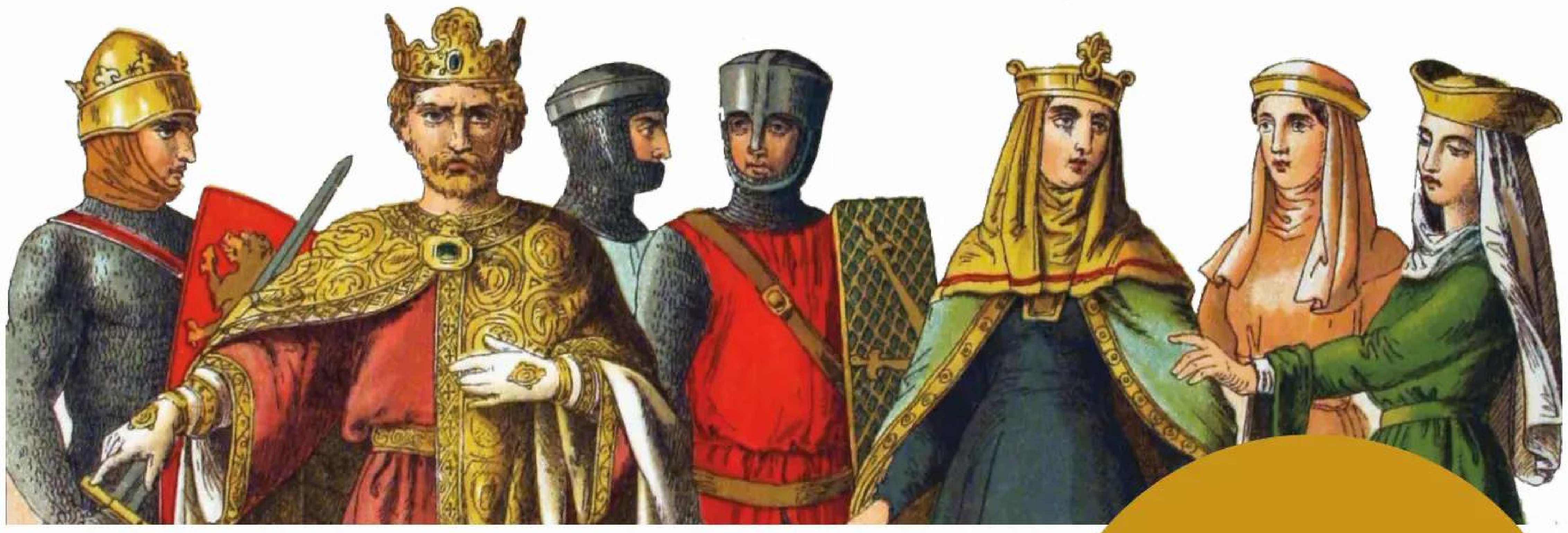
How Hastings changed history

After Hastings, the Normans set about fashioning England in their own image, sweeping away centuries of tradition and enacting reforms that are still felt today

For more than six centuries, the ways of England's Anglo-Saxon rulers were the strongest threads in the cultural cloth of the land. Upon the coming of the Normans in 1066, however, the Conqueror and the upper echelons of the houses of Normandy wrought some of the most far-reaching changes on a nation in all of European history. Within a few years the Normans replaced England's aristocracy, and in decades had transformed English attitudes, architecture, institutions, language and customs.

The effects of these are apparent still, not just in museums, classrooms and crumbling ruins, but in offices of modern government, and the speech of English-speaking peoples. It had involved a great deal of violence and suffering, the killing and destitution of tens of thousands of lives and households. Yet in other areas, Norman transformations involved great creativity and skill.

We ask, what did the Normans do, and how did they do it? Here are some of the most significant repercussions of the Conquest.



Class-structure cataclysm

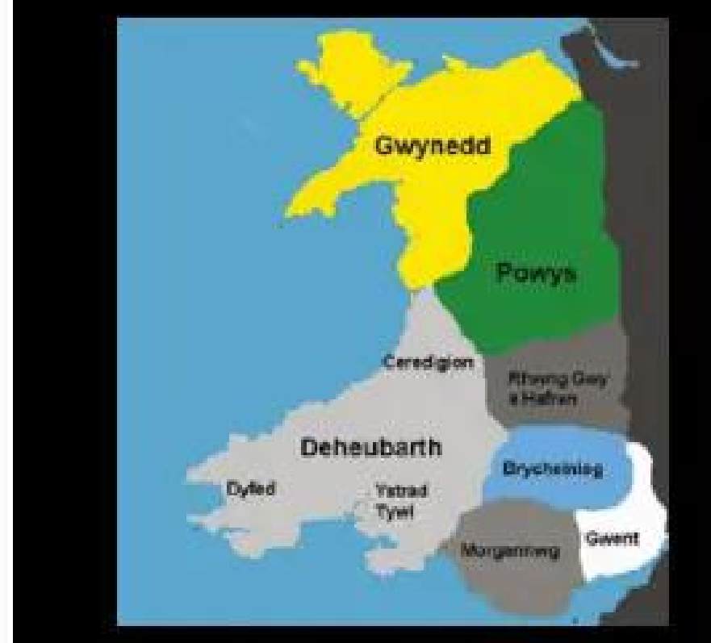
For England's aristocracy, the Norman conquest was devastating

By treating all lands as forfeit, William was able to enact a root-and-branch reform of the Anglo-Saxon system of nobles and thegns ('king's follower'). Between May 1068, when the coronation of his wife Queen Matilda was witnessed by a mixture of English and Normans, and 1086 when William held a massive meeting at Old Sarum in Salisbury, every witnessing noble became Norman. Of *Domesday*'s tenants-in-chief, only 13 were English, a mere four with lands worth more than £100. Gone were the 90 or so king's thegns owning 40 or more hides of land (a hide equaled about 30 acres). Only around ten percent of the 8,000 subtenants were English, indicating the 4,000-5,000 middling thegns had been expunged. Normans replaced native lords in almost every village and hamlet, sweeping away around 90 per cent of the English landowners. In 1086, just 200 Norman barons held half of England, and half of that was owned by William's family and friends. The Earl of Chester had 300 manors with an annual income of £800, yet even this immense wealth paled beside William's assets which, for owning twice as much land as all his barons combined, was worth £12,600. William constructed a monopoly, whereby every landowner in England held their lands from him as a tenant-in-chief or indirectly as the tenant of a lord, himself a king's subtenant. The aristocracy was bound to William by strict terms, and similar terms were imposed on the English Church. The old English aristocracy had been eclipsed in only a generation, its upper ranks made largely extinct, and its middle ranks forced into servitude.

> To tell people apart and control inheritances, men in post-conquest England were made to adopt surnames

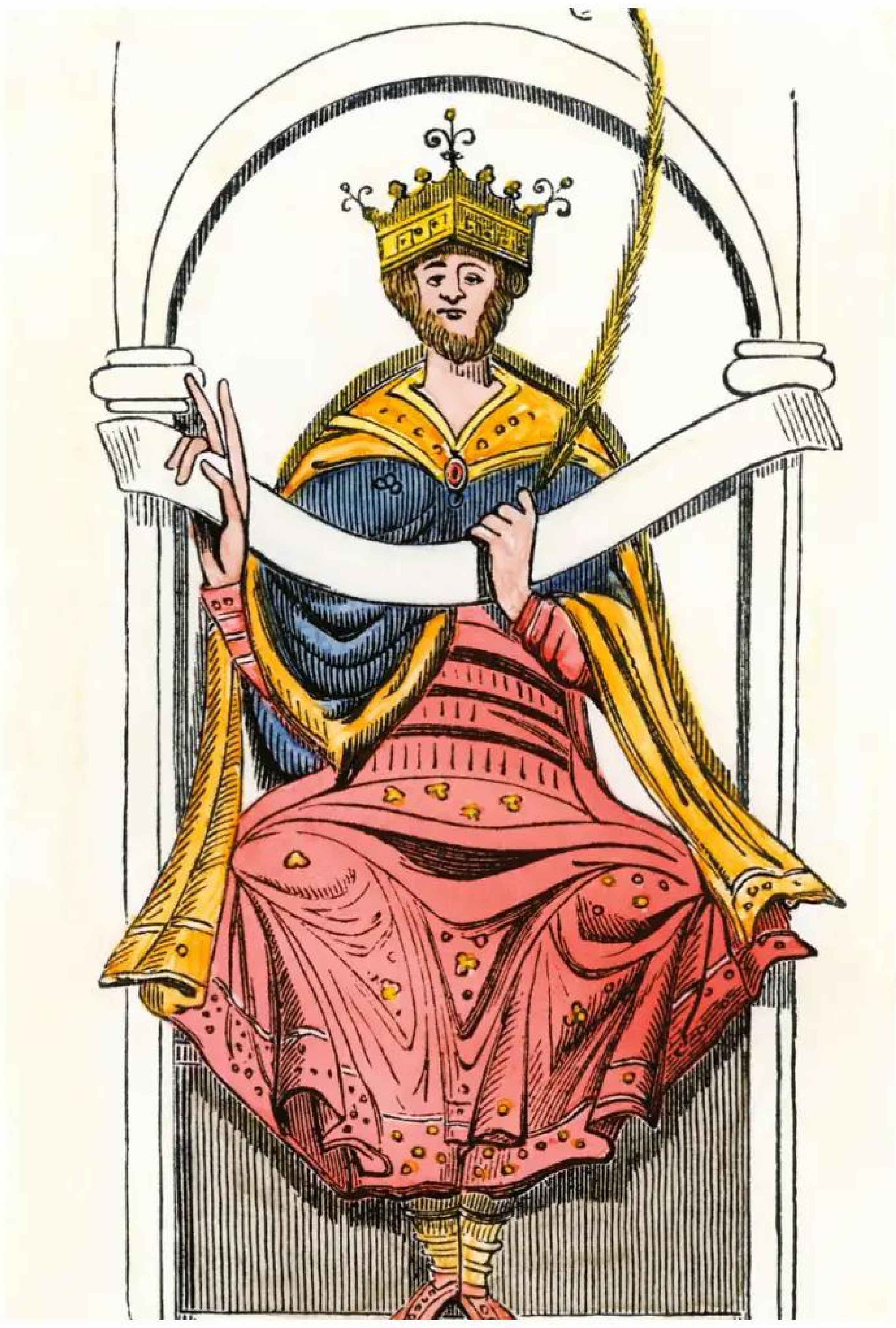
The subjugation of Wales

The Conqueror moved to tighten his grip on the Welsh kingdoms



Thanks to King's Harold's victory over the Welsh king Gruffydd ap Llywelyn in 1063, the country was in a weak and chaotic state when the Normans arrived there shortly after 1066. To prevent English rebels from joining with potential Welsh allies, the Conqueror established three new earldoms along the border with England. In south Wales, the rulers were prepared to bow to the superiority of the Earl of Hereford, William FitzOsbern, and their continued alliance through the earl's son Roger enabled the Welsh ruler Caradog ap Gruffydd to destroy his neighbouring king, thereby becoming the master of all Glamorgan in 1072. Early in 1081, the enmity between Wales' various rulers culminated in the Battle of Mynydd Carn, and in the aftermath of the struggle that killed three Welsh leaders, power passed to a new king, Rhys ap Tewdwr. William needed to establish control over Rhys, so he led an army to Wales' westernmost point at St. David's in Pembrokeshire in a display of strength, and established a new town and castle at Cardiff. By 1094 the Normans had built many Welsh castles. Most of the country was controlled by William's eldest son, William II, but by the turn of the 12th century most of Wales was back in Welsh control.

Throughout the rest of the Middle Ages, Wales was subject to perpetual upheavals as the pendulum of control swung back and forth between Welsh and English rulers. This chapter of struggles ended in 1294 when the country effectively became an English colony, and by 1542 its language and legal system were abolished under Henry VIII. England's lion had subjugated the Welsh dragon.



Revolts and rebellions

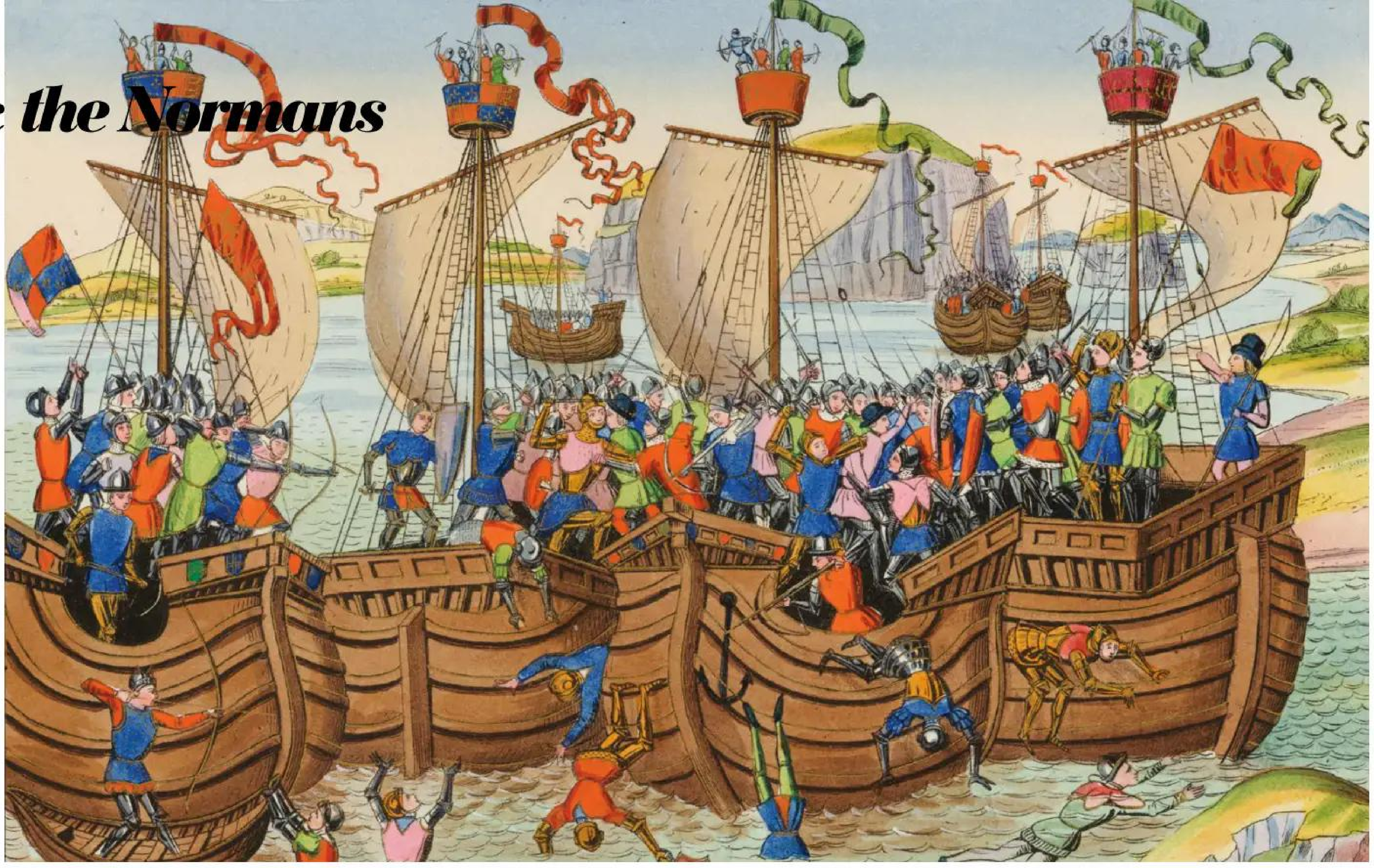
Holding onto the English crown involved suppressing several violent rebellions and conspiracies

After taking England's crown, retaining it proved far tougher for the Norman dynasty. The Revolt of the Earls plot was hatched at the wedding of Ralph de Guader to Roger of Hereford's sister in 1075. A third recruit, Earl Waltheof of Northumbria, had second thoughts, and was beheaded for his confession, while the others' armies were routed. This was the last serious plot against William, unique in that its leaders were French. After William's death in 1087, argument over the division of lands between two of his sons caused disruptions lasting for several months. In the 12th century these relatively small-scale conflicts escalated into bloody wars over England's crown. When the only legitimate son of Henry I drowned at sea in 1120, Henry tried to build support for the succession of his daughter, Matilda. But Stephen of Blois (William I's grandson) seized the throne, plunging England into a civil war known as the Anarchy. Hundreds of castles and counter-castles were built as chaos raged over England and Wales, not ebbing until 1153 when Matilda's son, Henry FitzEmpress, agreed to do homage to King Stephen, in return for being his successor. This was made official in the Treaty of Winchester and sealed with a 'kiss of peace' between Stephen and Henry in Winchester Cathedral. The successive King Henry II faced the Revolt of 1173-74 by three of his sons and their supporters. For a year and a half the Revolt engulfed territory from Scotland to Brittany. The day after Henry II did penance for the murder of Thomas Becket on 13 July 1174, a major rebel army was captured at the Battle of Alnwick, and he seized on this momentum to mop up the rest of the opposition. The impressive legacy of Norman power belies the terrible cost of holding onto this power, not only on their own families, but for people all over their kingdom.

Banning the slave trade

Backed by the Church, the Normans abolished slavery

From the early Iron Age, right through the Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods, the slave class was a British institution and a commercial bulwark in England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. Back when the Normans had been Norsemen, slaves were constantly traded with Scandinavia from northern France, and up to the second half of the 10th century there was a thriving slave market in Rouen, the Normandy capital. By the first half of the 11th century it had gone, and slavery was rare afterwards. Right up to the eve of the Conquest, England's slave trade flourished, after which many slaves (ten per cent of whom made up the population) were emancipated by Norman masters, and given houses and plots of lands on which to live as dependent peasants. Economic factors for this decline are possible, but perhaps greater was the moral pressure brought to bear by reforming church leaders on the dukes of Normandy. William the Conqueror had a financial interest in slavery, yet he acted to curtail the trade with his so-called Laws, a move that showed him to accord with the Church's humane approach, even if the manumission of slaves hurt him financially. After William's death, the Church reinforced William's anti-slavery position, declaring in the 1102 Synod of London that "never again should anyone engage in the infamous business, prevalent in England, of selling men like animals." By that time slavery had virtually vanished in France, central Italy, and Spanish Catalonia.



English emigration

Hundreds of Englishmen fled after the Conquest

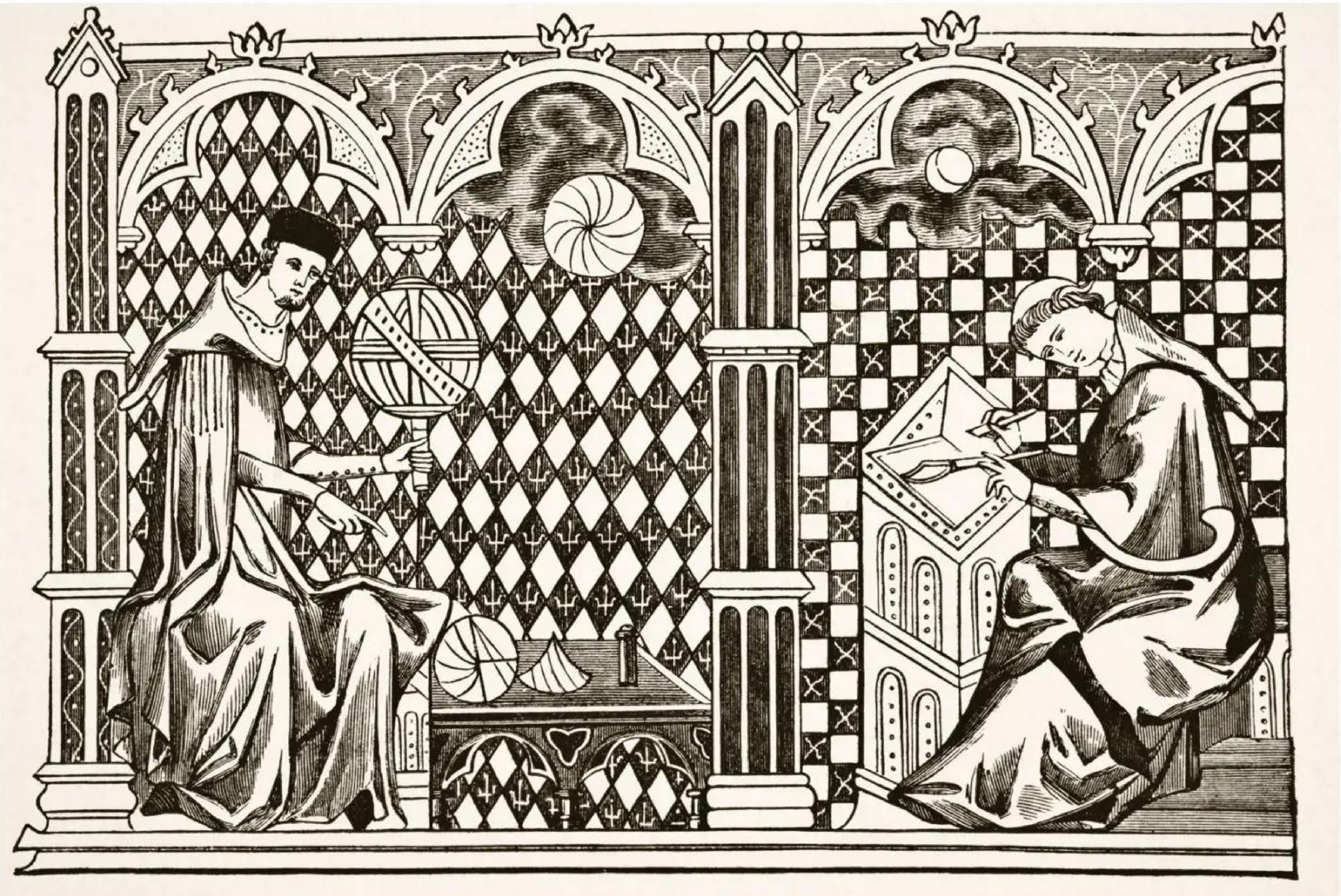
Norman rule proved beyond the pale for many Anglo Saxons, seeking refuge in Scotland, Scandinavia, or Ireland from where King Harold's family launched invasions without success. An Icelandic saga records the greatest exodus, one consisting of 350 ships (235 in another source) that sailed for the Byzantine Empire. Led by Earl Siward of Gloucester, they sailed to Ceuta on Morocco's northern coast, killing its Muslim occupants and plundering its treasure. Following the seizure of Majorca and Minorca, they sailed to Constantinople, where for defeating the besieging fleet, the Emperor Alexius I Comneus allowed them to live in service as part of the elite Varangian Guard. This offer was tempting to some since the Varangians only battled at critical junctures, and had first dibs at any spoils. Yet Earl Siward and others wanted their own realm, so Alexius granted them land "six days north and north-east of Constantinople", where Siward repelled the heathens and established New England with towns named after those in the homeland, like London and York. Or so it is said, for while the assimilation of Anglo-Saxons into the Varangian Guard at this time is historically attested, the identity of Earl Siward, and the historicity of the New England colony has been impossible to verify. The Crimean Peninsula has been proposed by at least one leading Byzantine historian, including a potential site where Anglo-Saxon emigrants founded a 'New London'. Even today, some people in Eastern Europe claim descent from these medieval immigrants.

Planting forests

William's love of hunting legislated in Forest Law

Despite esteeming hunting and huntsmen in their pagan mythology, Anglo-Saxon monarchs appear to have allowed their kinsmen to take forests for granted, making no effort to protect them or their wildlife from unrestricted hunting. The Normans changed this over the 11th century with the introduction of Forest Law. William the Conqueror was notoriously keen on hunting, with the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* stating "He loved the stags as much as if he were their father". The term 'forest', which first appears in England in the *Domesday Book*, applied to any kind of land reserved for the recreational hunting of the king and his guests. Its own law was designed to protect the 'noble' animals of the chase: red and fallow deer, roe deer, marten, wild boar, wolf, and the hare. Also protected were the fowl birds pheasant, and partridge. Forest Law operated outside common law and was rigorously enforced by a hierarchy of guards, who surveilled these lands and meted out punishments to poachers. The *Rime of King William* (1086) says that "whoever killed a hart or a hind should be blinded", for example. The most famous of the forests created by William was the New Forest in Hampshire, a place whose relative peacefulness nowadays (except in the summer season) gives no clue as to the hundreds of people who, on William's orders, were expelled from their homes in some 20 villages and a dozen hamlets to make the area fit only for the inhabitation of animals. Despite, or perhaps because of Forest Law, the boar became extinct in England's wilds in the 13th century, and the wolf by the late 15th century.

By 1091 Sicily was under Norman control until William III was overthrown by the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry VI, in 1194



The first time a King of England visited Ireland was when Henry II landed at Waterford on 17 October 1171

Religious revolution

Normans started a religious resurgence with laws and building works

In August 1070, William managed to appoint a new archbishop of Canterbury, his long-time friend, spiritual advisor, and the most celebrated scholar in Europe, Lanfranc. Both men saw the English Church as in need of reform and introduced separate church courts, archdeacons and church councils. Practices such as simony (selling church roles) and clerical marriage were banned, although Lanfranc allowed priests to keep existing partners, perhaps mindful to avoid the riot that almost killed the archbishop of Rouen in 1072 when he forbade the wives of married clerics from conducting themselves in public.

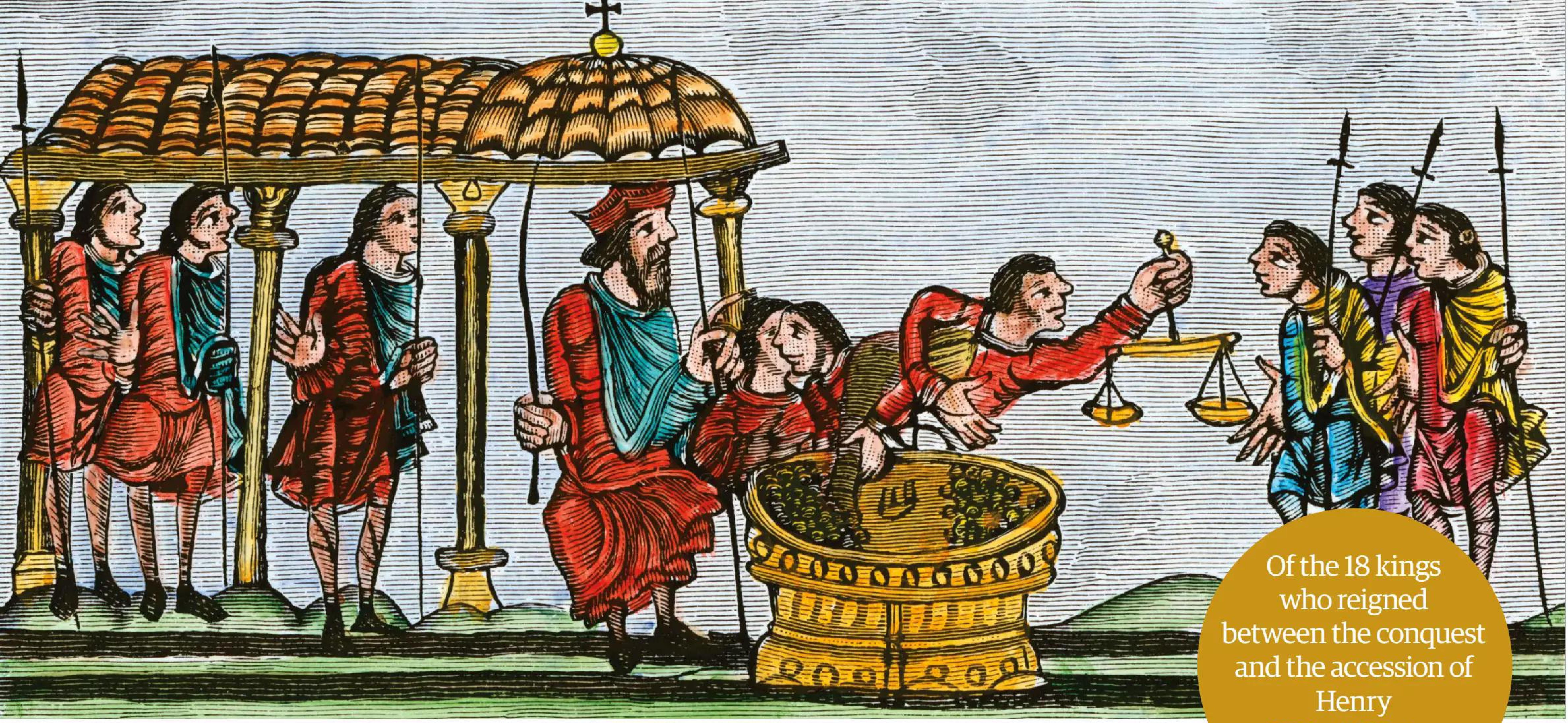
In terms of architecture, archbishop Lanfranc instigated a revolution that endures to this day. In December 1067, fire gutted the cathedral church of Canterbury, and Lanfranc commissioned a building in the new Romanesque style. In 1072 construction began on the Lincoln Cathedral, and over the decade new cathedrals and abbey churches began at Salisbury, Chichester, Rochester, St. Albans and Winchester, prompting William of Malmesbury to remark, "you do not know which to admire more, the beauty or the speed." Soon after the Harrying of the North in 1069, a religious revival in the north saw monasteries founded or restored at Selby, Jarrow, Whitby, Monkwearmouth, Durham, and York. 70 years after the Conquest, the number of monasteries in England had more than quadrupled from about 60 to almost 300.

By the 1120s William of Malmesbury wrote, "You may see everywhere churches in villages, in towns and cities, monasteries rising in a new style of architecture, and with a new devotion our country flourishes." The other most visible legacy of the Normans are castles, mostly motte-and-bailey or ringwork constructs, which were easy to defend. Arguably the most iconic example of Norman building is the White Tower, the central keep at the Tower of London, which was started by William I in the 1070s as a royal palace, and not completed until more than a decade after his death, at which time it became a prison. Not since the Romans had constructions like these been seen in England.

Establishing juries

The Normans strengthened the Anglo-Saxon legal system

While unable to claim it as being entirely their innovation, the Norman dynasty established trial by jury as a constitutional aspect of English legal custom, greatly enlarging the scale of its deployment to resolve the disputes of the population under their rule. 70 years before the conquest, the 'twelve leading thegns' of the wapentake (the Anglo-Saxon assembly) who swore never to accuse the innocent or protect the guilty were the foundation of what later became juries. Such juries were used by William the Conqueror to make the *Domesday Book*; otherwise, disputes between Englishmen and Frenchmen were decided via trial by combat (the European method) or the 'ordeal by iron' – carrying or walking across red-hot metal (the Anglo-Saxon method). These methods were replaced by the 'assizes' under Henry II, who reigned from 1154. The 'grand assize' for deciding actions of right consisted of 12 knights, and the 'petty assize' of freemen decided disputes of possession or inheritance. Unlike today's jurors who listen impassively before reaching a verdict, jurors in Henry II's assizes were expected to be men of local standing who knew the facts about a case, effectively acting as witnesses before the king's justices. Assizes in some towns (like Northampton) called on jurors to openly name neighbours of theirs whom they suspected of serious offences, which was an invitation to settle scores. The idea was to purge England of wrongdoers at a fell stroke, but although many were accused, few were ever caught. The effect was to scatter outlaws into England's greenwoods, clarifying over time into the semi-legendary figure of Robin Hood.



Of the 18 kings who reigned between the conquest and the accession of Henry VII in 1485, ten died violently

Monetary reform

The systems of coinage and taxations were overhauled and modernised

In pre-conquest England, the geld (public tax) was a dependable cash cow for the rulers. The lion's share of it was needed to pay off invaders and maintain a large fleet to repel invasions and make conquests (except under Edward the Confessor who did away with his fleet in 1051). By 1066 and some time after, however, the king was gradually receiving less money for several reasons. The amount of lands eligible for assessment (hides) was being eroded due to concessions granted in exchange for the king's ear. Due to the Normans' genocidal rampages in the north and along the southern coast and Welsh borders, as well as castle-building projects that wasted a lot of land; the surge in lands unfit for cultivation reduced revenue even more. Also, the debasement of the silver coin currency with inferior metals, as well as the Forest becoming a tax-free zone, even point-blank refusals to pay geld, all threatened a cash crisis for the Norman dynasty. Norman landlords increased their tenants' rents to levels that weighed heavily on the peasantry. The number of freemen plummeted to a fraction of their pre-Conquest levels, while the number of servile peasants rocketed.

The *Domesday Book* abounds with complaints about rents exceeding the value of the land, and the phrase "he is now a villein" is common, meaning a former landowner had become a lowly villager. To claw back money to fund a war in Maine, northern France, William tripled the geld rate in 1084. Coming on the heels of a famine in 1082, it was a double-whammy for the population, still recovering from the various crackdowns. "The king and his leading men," said the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, "were fond, yea, too fond of avarice: they coveted gold and silver, and did not care how sinfully it was obtained." To combat the silver currency problem, Henry I reformed the coinage three times in the 12th century, inflicting harsh physical punishments to anyone who debased his coin, and established the greatest of England's medieval institutions; the Exchequer. The sessions held at this table ensured that the king's money was duly collected and then spent in the right place, at the right time, and by the right people.

Language and literature

The Normans enriched England's language and literature

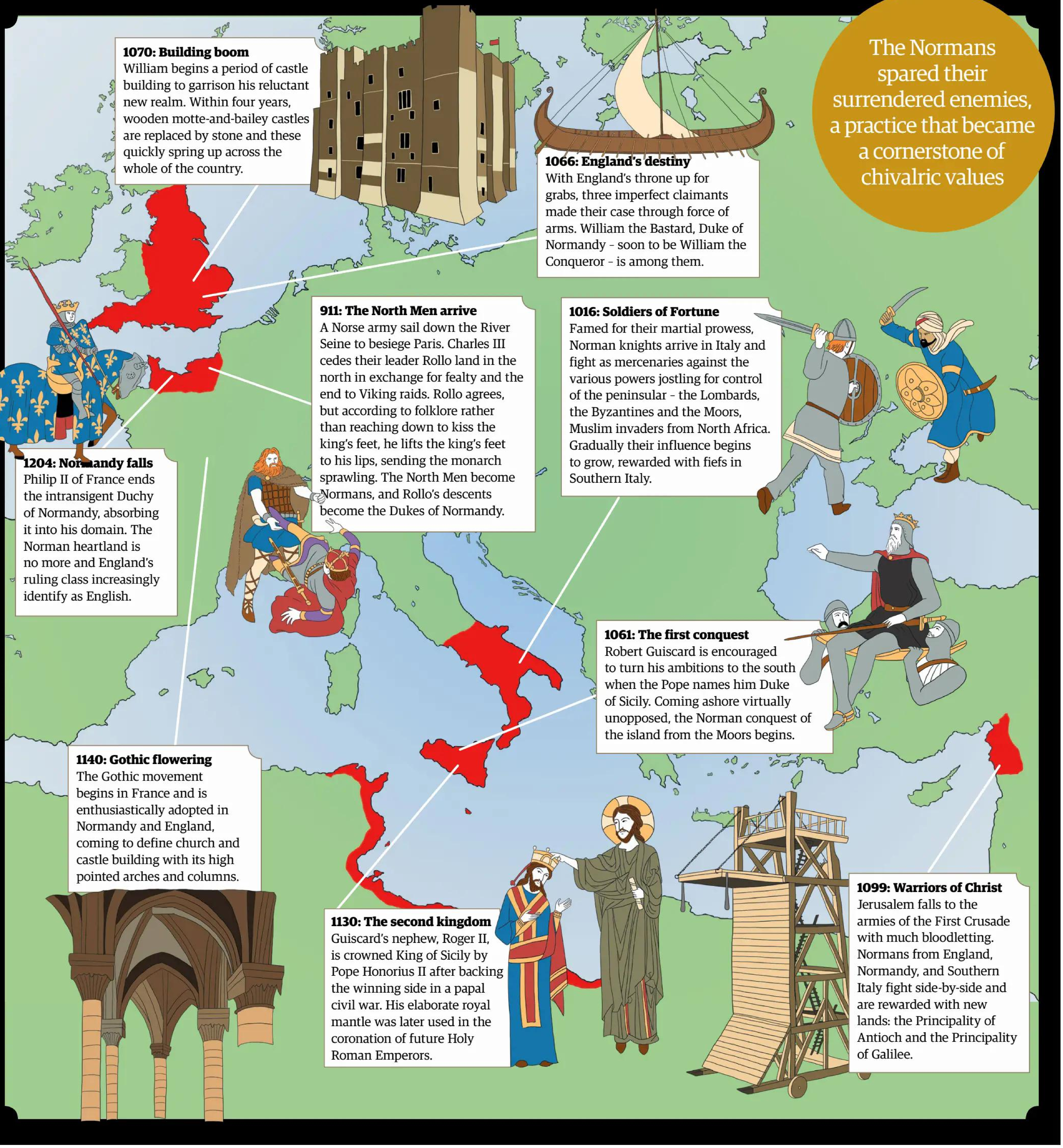
One of the Normans' most profound and far-reaching effects on England's culture is in the sphere of language and literacy. At first, William the Conqueror issued his instructions in written English, but he tried and failed to learn English, and with a handful of exceptions it stopped being the official language of government after 1070, and English literature sharply declined too. "Now that teaching is forsaken, and the folk are lost", lamented one of the few poets using English after 1066, "Now there is another people which teaches our folk. And many of our teachers are damned and our folk with them."

By the end of the 1100s, hardly anyone could read Old English, yet French and Latin from the Normans enriched the Isles' vernacular. A hallmark of English identity for the Normans' descendants became bilingualism, with educated people learning Latin as well. In the late 1200s Robert of Gloucester wrote, "unless a man knows French he is little thought of, but low-born men keep to English and to their own speech still." Today's legal vocabulary mainly consists of words rooted in French (agreement, burglary, court, debt, evidence, justice, fines, prison, constables, arrests, etcetera). Ironically, the French had no written literature of their own until it was pioneered in post-conquest England. Possibly inspired by Anglo-Saxon literature like *Beowulf*, in the century following the conquest a splendid literary revival (in Latin and French) took place in England in parallel with the rise of chivalry and values like courtly romance and questing.

The *Chanson de Roland*, an epic poem of Charlemagne's wars against the Saracens, was composed in England in the early 12th century. The first historical work in French was Geoffrey Gaimar's *History of the English* (c.1136-7). English authors, often of mixed Anglo-Norman families, attained a Continental influence rarely equaled since. The most extraordinary of these works, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regium Britanniae* (c.1136) plumbed legend and fantasy to create an epic that became one of the most popular historical works in the European Middle Ages. Walter Map, a Herefordshire priest at Henry II's court, wrote a French version of the Holy Grail and Lancelot stories in c.1180. Surviving copies of this work outnumber any other medieval manuscript.

From conquest to culture

In less than three centuries the Normans rewrote the rules and carved out land across Europe and the Near East



1070: Building boom
William begins a period of castle building to garrison his reluctant new realm. Within four years, wooden motte-and-bailey castles are replaced by stone and these quickly spring up across the whole of the country.

1066: England's destiny
With England's throne up for grabs, three imperfect claimants made their case through force of arms. William the Bastard, Duke of Normandy - soon to be William the Conqueror - is among them.

The Normans spared their surrendered enemies, a practice that became a cornerstone of chivalric values

911: The North Men arrive
A Norse army sail down the River Seine to besiege Paris. Charles III cedes their leader Rollo land in the north in exchange for fealty and the end to Viking raids. Rollo agrees, but according to folklore rather than reaching down to kiss the king's feet, he lifts the king's feet to his lips, sending the monarch sprawling. The North Men become Normans, and Rollo's descents become the Dukes of Normandy.

1016: Soldiers of Fortune
Famed for their martial prowess, Norman knights arrive in Italy and fight as mercenaries against the various powers jostling for control of the peninsular - the Lombards, the Byzantines and the Moors, Muslim invaders from North Africa. Gradually their influence begins to grow, rewarded with fiefs in Southern Italy.

1204: Normandy falls
Philip II of France ends the intransigent Duchy of Normandy, absorbing it into his domain. The Norman heartland is no more and England's ruling class increasingly identify as English.

1061: The first conquest
Robert Guiscard is encouraged to turn his ambitions to the south when the Pope names him Duke of Sicily. Coming ashore virtually unopposed, the Norman conquest of the island from the Moors begins.

1140: Gothic flowering
The Gothic movement begins in France and is enthusiastically adopted in Normandy and England, coming to define church and castle building with its high pointed arches and columns.

1130: The second kingdom
Guiscard's nephew, Roger II, is crowned King of Sicily by Pope Honorius II after backing the winning side in a papal civil war. His elaborate royal mantle was later used in the coronation of future Holy Roman Emperors.

1099: Warriors of Christ
Jerusalem falls to the armies of the First Crusade with much bloodletting. Normans from England, Normandy, and Southern Italy fight side-by-side and are rewarded with new lands: the Principality of Antioch and the Principality of Galilee.

WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR AND THE NORMANS

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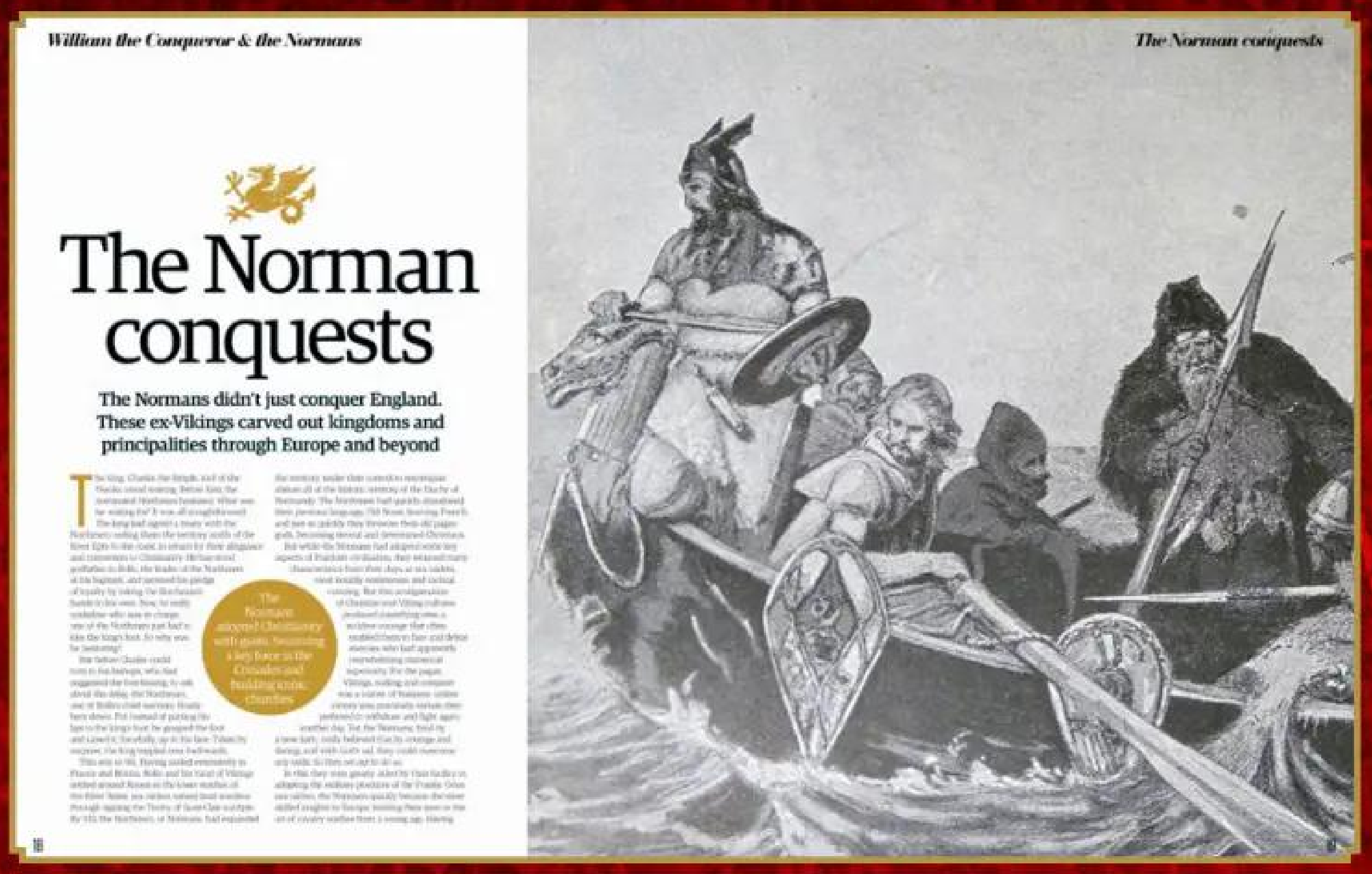
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